10
BRILLIANT
NEW STORIES

argosy

Taylor Caldwell
John Wain
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Adrian
Conan Doyle

SEPTEMBER 3/-
Price in Australia

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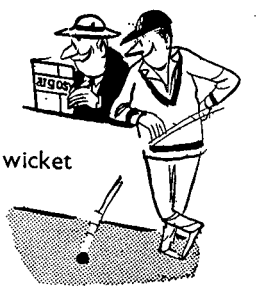


At the Oval,
watching cricket

Rest your eyes
from crease and wicket

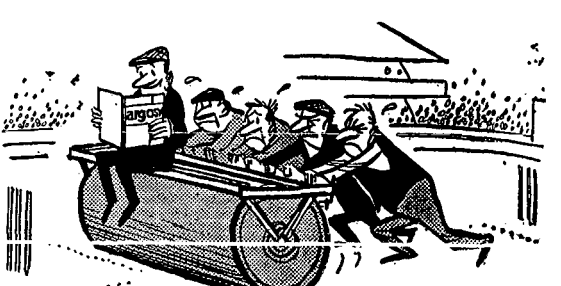
Googly, lob,
or l.b.w.

Odious bowling
need not trouble you . . .

Serene, although
the game's a frost

You read the
Monthly with the Most

ARGOSY



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argosy

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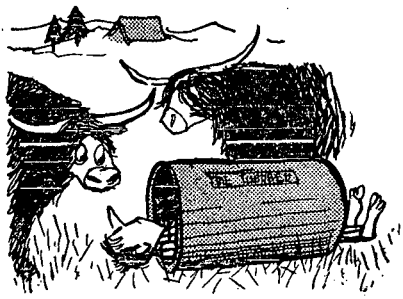

Log Book

WHEN the weekend is fine we sometimes wistfully study the advertisements for camping equipment, with thoughts of hiking off to the moors, rucksack on back . . . campfire smoke, the tang of food cooked in the open air, and nights under the stars. We never get any further than this—recollections of real-life camping harp too painfully on soaked bedding, prolonged fiddlings with wet sticks, the tang of food drenched in methylated spirits, and campfire smoke, ubiquitous as mustard gas, successfully proving the inanity of that saying about smoke and fire.

But never mind, it's nice to read the ads. Camping is a very different affair from our rub-two-sticks-together Wolf Cub days.

Big family tent, 3 rooms—2 bed, 1 recep.—only 30 gns. Portable gas cooker, sink, TV, suitable for tent. Two-tone chalet tent, continental, with luxury swing seat thrown in; toilet tent, plastic-topped table, light-weight armchairs, tubular camp beds. We once heard of a diehard benighted camper, who slept in a brand new drainpipe on a Welsh mountain road, but the idea of tubular beds is new to us, and it is a good one, provided the tube can somehow be stoppered against the weather and insured against the danger of rolling downhill into a herd of Highland cattle. Collapsible water carriers also sound useful, though collapsible water would be even better. A spray-kit for waterproofing the tent seems essential—why not employ it on bedding, socks, shirts, and handkerchiefs too?

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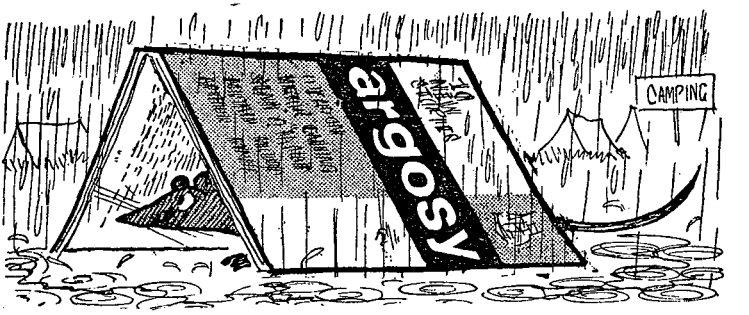
The result of all this wishful reading last weekend was an extraordinary dream which assaulted us as we lay in our non-tubular bed on Sunday night. We dreamed that we had acquired a new American invention known as the Arkansaw Autocamper. This consisted of a station-wagon complete with folding TV, bunks, sink, and computer. The computer, having been duly programmed with all the desired characteristics—mountains, stream, farm, limestone soil—would select a suitable camping-site on the map. Then, programmed with the home-base, it would work out a route. Finally, campers meanwhile peacefully asleep in their unfolded bunks, it would pack up all the equipment and set off, at a steady 80 m.p.h., for the chosen site.

All went well in the dream at first. The computer buzzed over the map, hummed, clicked, and selected. The route was nosed out by a bony metallic finger. The packing-arms went to work, and all the clutter of camping equipment was deftly rolled, folded, and rammed into the baggage hold. We settled to sleep, and soon the miles were flashing away behind, the speedo reading was soaring. But then, halfway through the journey, we woke to suffocating helpless terror, and the realisation that the Auto-camper was hurtling at 80 m.p.h. down a long, steep, straight hill towards an endless procession of crossing buffalo. Would it be equal to the situation? Or would the dream end in disaster?

Miraculously, it was equal. Two antennae swooped forward, detected the buffalo, and alerted the cow-catching arms, which went into action in the nick of time, tossing buffalo gently but firmly out of our path. All was well; we could go back to sleep.

In fact the only snag appeared when we arrived at the camp-site on what proved to be the first of fourteen days of steady, drenching rain, and discovered that the Autocamper had forgotten to pack the gumboots. In real life, of course, we would have packed lavish supplies of Argosy so that we could stay in bed and read while the Autocamper dealt with the wet sticks.

JOHN SILVER



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Samaritan Loophole

BY STEWART FARRAR

I CAN'T say Mahmoud Tawfiq and I were bosom pals, exactly. A foreign correspondent whose manor stretches from Cairo to Teheran one way, and from Istanbul to Aden the other, gets to know a lot of people—and some of his best friends hate each other. Anyhow, Mahmoud is now beyond reach of anyone's bosom, except perhaps the Prophet's—though I doubt if Mahmoud had earned that.

I don't even know if anyone hated him. That knife through the back of his chair was probably just a business operation, with nothing personal about it.

I was in Jordan collecting reactions to the latest Syrian coup; feeling a little cheesed because it was the third time I'd done just that in as many years, and frankly I could have written my piece equally well from my desk in Beirut. Everyone in Amman had said what I'd expected them to; and now everyone in Jerusalem was saying it, too. Even the barman downstairs in the National, where I always stayed. The barman and his jokes were both old friends of mine.

We were listening to the Israeli news on the barman's transistor set (if we'd been listening to Cairo we could both have been gaoled—a confusing manor, this) when Mahmoud came out of the lift.

"Marhaba, Mahmoud!" I called to him. "Keef al-haal?"

He grinned cheerfully, answering my greeting and joining me at the bar. I was glad to see him, because I was hungry for cheerful company, and in any case an utterly amoral businessman like Mahmoud Tawfiq might add a little spice to the clichés I'd been gathering. So I brought him an arrack and asked, "What do you make of this thing in Damascus?"

"The Army and the Government," Mahmoud said, "are like two wives kicking each other out of bed. A monogamous Syria would know more peace."

"But each wife has influential relations," I told him, more to cap his simile than anything.

Mahmoud chuckled. "This is true, Dugald. I could tell you—" He broke off, looking at me thoughtfully.

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" What could you tell me? "

He didn't answer, but his eyes gave the very slightest of flickers in the direction of the barman. I was surprised, because I'd never had reason to believe the barman was in anyone's pay but the hotel's, and Mahmoud wasn't usually taciturn. I was still wondering whether to pursue the matter when Mahmoud asked for some cigarettes. The order sent the barman out of earshot for a few seconds, and Mahmoud leaned towards me and murmured, " Meet me at five o'clock in the—" He mentioned a

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rather squalid café in the Old City which I'd better not name, even now.

I nodded.

We dropped politics and swopped Arab shaggy-dog stories for ten minutes; then Mahmoud left.

I walked into the Old City an hour ahead of my date with Mahmoud, because I wanted to buy a present for my only static relative, an aunt in London. I knew she was fond of brass, so I went to a shop in the shadow of the Lutheran Erlöserkirche and haggled over a coffee service, finally agreeing to the shopkeeper's price if he would include the six porcelain inner cups he usually sold separately.

I won my point, and to celebrate the fact I bought a couple of Damascus brocade stoles for a pound each, to give to a friend who was neither my aunt nor static. They made useful packing for the coffee service, too. The whole lot just fitted into my briefcase; I left the shop swinging it cheerfully—as much as there's room to swing anything in the Old City—and feeling rather pleased with myself.

I meandered through the rabbit-warren lanes, where the open-fronted shops face each other so closely that their owners can grab at both your elbows simultaneously. A working knowledge of Arabic does at least show you're not a tourist, so I had an easier passage than most, and I reached the café just after five.

The café wasn't large, but it managed to be rambling; a tortuous little cluster of cells in the great beehive of Jerusalem, and dark at that. I peered around in the gloom till I found Mahmoud, wedged so tightly between a small table and a Byzantine pillar that the table-edge cut into his belly. He waved to me, and I manœuvred across to join him.

"The places you choose!"

Mahmoud shrugged. "A good place to talk. So much noise, no one can hear; and so much dark, no one can see." In spite of these undeniable facts he managed to get us served with coffee.

"Well, Mahmoud—what's this you know?"

"Of the Syrian affair? I am afraid, nothing."

I looked at him, surprised. "But I thought . . ."

He spread his hands apologetically. "I know you thought, Dugald my friend, and it was better so. Forgive me for this little trick. I wanted to ask you something, in private."

I'd already filed enough reaction to satisfy my editor, so I thought, What the hell? Bread upon the waters, in my job, seldom returns void. "What can I do for you, Mahmoud?"

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His voice was so low I could only just hear him. "You sometimes visit the Other Side?"

In that corner of the world, the "Other Side" means only one thing—Israel. And an Israeli stamp in your passport automatically bars you from the Arab countries. Tortuous methods and a lot of diplomatic pretence are needed if your job requires you to visit both sides frequently. I reminded myself that I didn't know Mahmoud all that well. Caution seemed called for.

"Why do you ask, Mahmoud?"

"My friend—you will forgive me again—we both know very well that you do; you could not work otherwise."

"A cigarette?" I temporised.

He held up a burning stub. "Thank you, Dugald, I have . . . Do not be embarrassed, my friend. I want to suggest how you could earn a little money. Say a thousand American dollars."

"Hm."

"You see this case?" He lifted a briefcase which stood on the floor beside my own. "It is simply a matter of getting it to my cousin in—" he mouthed the name almost soundlessly—"Tel Aviv, in the next four days. It is quite harmless, I assure you—of interest to no one but an archaeologist, such as the American who is prepared to pay my cousin well for it. *I* cannot go there, and my cousin cannot come *here*."

"Why can't the American himself?"

"Because he is Jewish."

"Oh."

Mahmoud put the briefcase back on the floor. "A thousand dollars, Dugald? It is so easy for you—and you could make money helping my family to make money."

This was awkward. I had turned down such requests before, even for close friends. The thousand dollars made it both more tempting and more suspect; I am no less greedy, and no less cowardly, than most men.

"Let's have another coffee," I hedged, turning to look for the waiter. "Where's he got to?"

Mahmoud grunted something.

I can't be certain, in retrospect, but I'd say about twenty seconds had passed before I gave up trying and turned back to Mahmoud.

"Oh well, he'll be around . . . Look, Mahmoud, I'd like to help—but it's tricky for me, you know. I have to keep my nose clean with everybody. If I get caught doing something like that, it's not just a question of a fine or confiscation. It could make it difficult for me to do my job. You do see that, don't you?"

Mahmoud stared straight ahead, not answering.

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" Now I've offended you," I said—and then I froze.

The cigarette end in Mahmoud's mouth was burning against his lip, but he did not move or blink.

" Mahmoud! " I gasped, leaning towards him, my arm round the back of his chair. " Mahmoud, what—? "

My cuff caught on something. It was the handle of a knife. It had been pushed through the flimsy canework of the chair, and blood was oozing from it.

Mahmoud was dead.

If I acted quickly and calmly, it was by sheer instinct; because I was numb with panic inside. The clamour in the dim café had not changed. Whoever had stabbed Mahmoud had slipped out unnoticed—and taken the briefcase. No one was looking our way; I pulled the cigarette from Mahmoud's lips and stubbed it in my saucer.

This was no place for me.

I grabbed my own briefcase, and stood up. " Be seeing you, then," I managed to say; and a few seconds later I was in the alley, moving away as fast as I could without drawing attention to myself.

By the time I was through Herod's Gate, I was more or less thinking straight.

In theory, I should go to the police. But there was nothing I could do for Mahmoud any more; and in that labyrinth, the murderer must have been uncatchable even before I'd realised what had happened. I'd clearly touched the fringes of something very nasty about which I knew nothing—not, in my manor, for the first time—and I was better out of it. This wasn't England. It wasn't even Soho.

Along Saladin Road, I slackened my pace, compelling myself to breathe evenly. Something was nagging for my attention, but in my fight to be calm I pushed it away from consciousness.

It wasn't till I reached my hotel room and threw my briefcase on the bed that I realised what had been worrying me.

The briefcase was *not* mine. It was Mahmoud's.

It was very like my own; not surprising, as I'd bought mine in Jerusalem. It had felt, in my hand, the same as mine—almost. But as soon as I looked at it properly I knew it wasn't. It was newer, darker, and without the leather name-card tag I kept fixed to mine; probably it was that tag which I'd subconsciously missed. It was also locked.

This makes things different, I thought. I may have to go to the police after all. But before I decided, I wanted to know what was inside; what I was involved with.

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I tried my own keys. My briefcase key didn't work; my suitcase key didn't, either, but it caught encouragingly on the way round. I tried again, jiggling and manœuvring, and suddenly the lock gave.

Inside the case was a parcel of tissue paper. I tore the paper off, and found a wooden box with a screwed-on three-ply lid. A nail file dealt with the screws.

The box and lid were lined with foam plastic, shaped to hold the four blackened objects that were cradled within. They looked like small logs of rotting wood, but their flaking surface wasn't like bark. Parchment, perhaps . . . A bell rang in my mind; the memory of an interview with Yusif Saad, the Curator of the Archaeological Museum just down the road. I knew what the dark logs almost certainly were.

Dead Sea Scrolls. Perhaps the most valuable documents in the world.

Saad—a Bedouin himself—had told me how badly his museum needed funds to bargain with the desert Bedouin who, he knew, were still hoarding undisclosed Scrolls they had found in the scorched brown cliffs by the Dead Sea shore. Waiting their moment to sell. And these?

I must go and see Saad. He would know what to do.

But at that moment something hard and cold was jabbed against the back of my neck. I jumped; the girl's voice which spoke to me was just as hard, just as cold.

"Stand up," she said, "and don't try to touch them. If you do I shall blow your head off."

For a moment I was tempted to tackle her at once. I'd probably have managed it; my Army training wasn't buried all that deep. But if I had, one or both of us would have fallen across those precious and fragile Scrolls; and I like to think it was that which made me use cunning.

"All right," I said. I got up, slowly, and moved away from the bed, turning so that I could see her. She followed me with her eyes—and with the gun.

"Not that it matters," I told her. "Those are fakes, anyway."

It worked. She threw a startled glance at the box of Scrolls, and in that instant I leapt, slamming the edge of my left hand down on her wrist and snatching at the gun barrel with my right. I fumbled, but she dropped it, and we both lost our balance as the carpet slid on the tiled floor.

There was no chivalry about that fight; it wouldn't have got even an X Certificate. She fought with a woman's fury and a man's efficiency, and if we hadn't both been concentrating on getting hold of the gun we'd have done each other a lot of serious

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damage. It had disappeared under the bed, so we had the Scrolls to worry about, too. I managed to get my foot to the gun and kick it into the open. We rolled away from the bed, clawing at each other and for the weapon at the same time.

We fetched up a yard away from it, face down, with my arm locked round her shoulders and one of her wrists in each hand. I didn't mind how hard I gripped. She tried to kick, but she couldn't reach.

"Stalemate, sweetheart," I told her, struggling to get my breath back. "How about a parley?"

Then the sky fell on the back of my head, and I don't remember any more.

I came slowly out of a dream, conscious at first only of the agony in my head and of the tiles under my cheek. Little by little it all came back, but I just didn't want to move. What was the point, anyway? I'd lost the fight, somehow; the room was silent; I might as well stay where I was till my eyes would open, at least.

How the hell had she done it, my clearing brain demanded? She *couldn't* have . . . Don't be damn stupid, I told myself. Some pal must have turned up and rescued her.

Oh well . . .

I sat up gingerly, nursing the back of my head and blinking my eyes. Nothing broken, at any rate. I lumbered to my feet.

The girl was lying on the floor beside me, as unconscious as I'd been. The gun had gone.

I whirled round to the bed. The Scrolls had gone, too—box, briefcase, and all.

I stood there, befuddled, for quite a while. Then I came to my senses. Whatever had happened, I'd better see to the girl first. She seemed undamaged, except for the bruises and scratches of our fight, and the beginning of a fine bump under the shiny black hair. I lifted her on to the bed, and she moaned as I moved her.

I was still groping among my memories of first aid when she opened her eyes. They saw me and blazed in anger, her hands flying up like claws. I backed away in a hurry.

"Hold it, sweetheart! We've *both* been done. Hold it!"

She sat up with a jerk, wincing, and looked wildly around.

"It's no good," I said. "They've gone, whoever they were. They've taken the Scrolls, and the gun, too."

"Who were they? What were they like?"

"Look, I didn't see them either. Somebody coshed us both."

"You're lying!"

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I sat on the edge of the bed, my back to her. "Am I? Feel my head. Gently, if you don't mind."

She did, and we faced each other again.

"Who are you?" she asked, still wary.

"Dugald Mackenzie, Middle East correspondent of the *London Announcer*." I fetched my passport and press card. "There you are. And who are *you*?"

"Jordanian Department of Antiquities," she said absently, frowning over my papers.

I laughed out loud. "Tell me another! Since when have they been armed?"

She looked up, angry again—with that fine dark anger an Arab girl can wear so magnificently. With one hand she unbuttoned a shirt pocket (I remember wondering how that button had survived our battle) and threw me a plastic-covered card, official-looking, with her photograph on it and the name Yola Daoud. It was she, all right. "Well!" I said feebly.

We sized each other up. "I think," she said at last, "the bumps on our heads are better credentials than our papers, perhaps."

"You've got something there, Yola," I agreed—and on the strength of it I told her all I knew. Some of it she already knew herself; she'd been following Mahmoud, expecting him to hand over the case to somebody, and when I met him and came away with it, she had followed me. She didn't know Mahmoud was dead, though. She shed no tears over him, either.

"How did you know I'd taken his case?" I asked.

"Yours had a label, and it was older," she said scornfully. I probably looked as sheepish as I felt.

"So where does this get us?" I wanted to know.

Yola answered, "If Tawfiq was killed for the Scrolls, I can guess who did it."

"How?"

"Never mind now. And I can guess which way they've gone." She jumped to her feet. "We must get a car."

"Mine's outside."

She grabbed my elbow, and before I knew what was happening I was belting up the Nablus road in my estate car as fast as I dared go, with Yola leaning eagerly forward in the passenger seat. It was dark already, and driving took all my attention till we were through Ramallah and the Judaean harshness was giving place to the softer fields of Samaria. The road was emptier, and I relaxed a little.

"Now fill me in," I told her.

"All right, but keep hurrying . . . There are two gangs after

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those Scrolls. Tawfiq was involved with one of them. Both of them are trying to get the Scrolls out through the Other Side, but they aren't Israelis. One lot is English and the other Italian."

"Which lot are we after now?"

"The English, I'm afraid. Do you mind?"

"On the contrary. The bump on the head makes it civil war. Besides, I'm Scottish . . . But why didn't you pick up Tawfiq?"

"Two reasons; we were interested in where he would lead us—and his bosses had let us know that if anyone trod too closely on their heels, they'd destroy the Scrolls. That's why I thought I'd won, when I caught you with your hands off them . . . Damn you, Mackenzie."

"Don't mention it. How was I to know?"

She brooded for a while, and went on, "And damn you for having a name-tag on your case. When the other gang discovered their mistake, they tracked you down at once."

"It's a pity about Auntie's coffee set," I remarked.

"Please?"

"Skip it. Where are we going now?"

"To the Samaritan Loophole."

"What the hell's that?"

"An illegal way across the Armistice Line, near Dothan. We know about it . . ."

"Why haven't you clamped down on it, then?"

"Because we know the English gang use it. And we've been waiting for—look out!"

I swerved to avoid the goat, collecting a few branches of prickly pear from the verge as I did so. They made the windscreen a mess, but no harm done otherwise. I pumped the screen-washer and raced on.

"Look, Yola," I said, "I know the Dead Sea Scrolls are valuable—but a lot have been found. Are four more of them worth murder, and gang warfare, and arms for the Department of Antiquities?"

"You know the story of the Scrolls?"

"Yes—they were the library of the Essene monastery at Qumran, by the Dead Sea, and the Essenes hid them before the Romans wiped out the monastery in A.D. 68."

"That's right. But the four Scrolls you had today may be something special. They are believed to show where the Essenes went to, when they fled from the Romans. These gangs know what they're after. They want to reach the Essenes' second home—which everybody is looking for—and loot it first. They could hold the museums of the world to ransom."

I whistled. "Those four Scrolls must be worth the earth!"

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" They are," Yola said. " Careful, the road turns left about here."

The crescent moon had set, and the gentle hills around Dothan—the village where Joseph's brothers threw him in the pit and then sold him into slavery—were a dim undulating horizon in the starlight. The Armistice Line was only a mile or two away—but the hut we were watching was a mere hundred yards in front of us. We'd left the car some way back, and walked—later crawled—to our present hideout in a clump of olive trees.

" The lamp's in the right-hand window," Yola whispered in my ear. " That means the Loophole's clear and they're ready for customers. Good—we're ahead of the English."

" We were ay that . . . How come you know the code? "

" I know what I'm doing," she said.

" I hope so! "

" Quieter! "

" Sorry. I hope so, but why didn't we collect some police on the way? "

" I know what I'm doing," she repeated.

The more I thought of the implications, the less I liked them. " We're not even armed."

" Stay there." She slipped away in the darkness, and after a while I heard the faint clink of stones being moved. Then she was beside me again, unwrapping something. She guided my hand to it; I recognised a Luger. I was going to take it, but she pushed my hand away again.

" Oh well," I said, " I'm a stranger here myself. Do it your way." I wasn't sure if I felt better or worse.

" I intend to," Yola murmured, loading the Luger. " As you see, this trap is very well prepared. Even the Department of Antiquities can't carry guns all the time, and—"

She was suddenly silent. There was somebody approaching the hut. I picked them out against the sky: one . . . two figures. They passed within a few yards of us while I held my breath. I went on holding it till the hut door closed on them.

" Right," Yola whispered. " Come on, Mackenzie."

" Are you sure you don't want me to have the gun? "

" Quite sure, thank you. Come on."

I followed close behind her, because she seemed to know the ground, and I could hardly see a step ahead. We reached the window without stumbling, and peered carefully in from beyond the glow of the lamp.

The two Englishmen—if they *were* Englishmen—one tall and burly, the other looking half spiv, half scholar, were talking to a

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young Arab in shirtsleeves and a keffiyeh. The spiv-scholar had Mahmoud's briefcase under his arm.

We stayed there long enough to memorise the set-up, and tip-toed to the door. We paused outside, the gun in Yola's hand.

Then she kicked the door open.

I hand it to her; she had them cold. One look at her and they knew it.

"Put it on the table—very slowly," she said, in English.

The burly one swore, briefly—but long enough to tell me at least one of the "Englishmen" was Australian. He didn't try anything. The spiv-scholar went pale, and did as he was told. The Arab just looked.

"Fetch it, Mackenzie," Yola ordered, "but don't get between us."

I did as I was told, too—Yola had that sort of voice. She moved away from the door to keep them all in view; I picked up the case and joined her. She addressed the young Arab in his own language; a polite translation would be, "Get some rope and tie these sons of bitches up."

The Arab shrugged, and picked up some filthy-looking rope from a corner—moving slowly, taking no risks.

Then the hut door opened again, and nothing made sense any more.

The man who came in had a gun, too. He rapped, "Keep still!" and watched us all.

I was between him and Yola, and very unhappy indeed.

"Gamal," Yola said softly.

"Yola!" he gasped. Neither of them lowered those guns.

"Well, Gamal—what now?"

Gamal considered. "The gentleman gives me that case," he said in Arabic.

"No, he doesn't," Yola told him—and me—in the same language. "We make a bargain."

"I don't think you're in any position to bargain."

"Are *you* in any position to reject it, Gamal? Where are your reinforcements? I thought so. Look, it doesn't matter a great deal which of us has the case—so long as *these* don't." She inclined her head contemptuously towards Burly and Spiv-Scholar. "How about two each—and a head start for me before you take the Englishmen in?"

During the silence which followed I found myself wondering if "the Englishmen" included me.

"I'm sorry, Yola," Gamal said at last. "That won't do. For one thing, you might run into trouble and lose your two Scrolls.

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For another—how could I explain it to *my* people? If I have the four Scrolls to hand in—all is well and *you* never existed. It's all right, the Englishmen don't understand Arabic."

"Mackenzie does."

"He will not talk."

There was another silence. At last Yola sighed.

"Give him the case, Mackenzie. And take this gun. I nearly succeeded, Gamal; at least I saved the Scrolls from *them*. May I go now?"

"Allah guide you."

I passed over the case to Gamal, completely at sea.

"Handle them with love," she told him wistfully.

"I will. Salaamu alaykum, Yola."

Yola smiled. "Shalom, Gamal." The door opened and closed; she was gone.

"You were about to tie those two up, I think," Gamal remarked to the Arab in the keffiyeh. The man nodded and got on with it.

"Who are *you*, then?" I asked Gamal.

"From the Department of Antiquities."

"Oh." I absorbed this. "And Yola?"

"From the Israeli equivalent, the last I heard."

"Name of Allah! I'd have sworn she was an Arab!"

"There are many Arabs in Israel," Gamal reminded me, "and some of them are archaeologists. Yola and I were together at Oxford."

I said, "Oh," again. There didn't seem anything else to say.

"Mr. Mackenzie, you are a journalist, are you not? I thought I recognised you. I don't know how you came into this—but I have not seen you tonight, you have not seen me, and neither of us us has seen Yola Daoud. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

He lifted the briefcase. "*These* are the things which matter . . . And now, perhaps, you had better give me that gun, and go. When you reach Nablus, if you would be good enough to ring the police and direct them here. . . Just give my name—Gamal Habesh—not your own."

"Peace be with you," I said.

"And with you, peace."

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Is not this a lamentable thing . . . that parchment, being scribbled o'er, should undo a man?

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Henry VI, Part 2*

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A Faithful Wife

BY DIANA ATHILL

A FEW nights earlier Helen Blundell had said sleepily to her husband Roger, "You know something? I don't believe, now, that I could ever *bear* to make love with anyone but you."

"You'd better not!" he had answered, but he had turned over and pushed his head into the curve between her shoulder and her breast. It had been one of the times when their happiness together had crystallised in their lovemaking and they had both been equally and simultaneously aware of it.

Familiarity is supposed to make this dull, thought Helen before going to sleep. Five years of it . . . and she felt certain that she had gladly exchanged what it had once been for the kind of thing she had experienced a few minutes ago, when Roger had been stroking her back. She had felt, then, perfectly convinced that his skin and hers were enjoying exactly the same sensation, as though her back and his hand were parts of the same being. How lucky I am, she had thought, to be married to my own darling love.

She looked a lucky woman, too: relaxed and pretty, saved by an adequate income from domestic anxieties, and by an easygoing nature from creating them when they did not exist. She was readily pleased and amused, and intelligent enough to keep herself so when no entertainment offered. They had no child as yet, but that was not a sorrow. Roger, a consultant engineer, often had to travel, and they had decided that Helen should be free to share this until she was thirty. Her next birthday would be her thirtieth, and she intended to conceive on it—accustomed as she was to things going well for her, she did not doubt that this would happen, so even the prospect of leaving her twenties behind seemed to her promising rather than alarming. The Blundells' friends sometimes quoted them to each other as proof

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Delicately feminine, delightfully vague, Diana Athill is a full-time publisher and part-time writer. On her own cheerful admission, she wastes much good writing time in the evening chattering with friends. Despite this handicap—or perhaps because of it—she has had a collection of short stories published in this country, more appeared in volume-form in America last year, and this autumn she is bringing out an autobiographical book, Instead of a Letter. A prodigious reader, she delights equally in travel, favourite countries to date being the United States and Greece—the setting for her prize-winning story, The Return.

that a good marriage was a possibility, and the wives would say to each other, " Darling Helen—I'm very fond of her, of course, but she can be a shade smug."

Now Helen came into the drawing-room of one of these friends, coming to lunch alone because Roger was in Manchester, and " No! " she exclaimed, stopping abruptly just inside the door. " It can't be! "

The man standing by the fireplace put down his glass, bumped a table in his haste to cross the room to her, put his arms round her, and kissed her on the mouth. " Helen! " he said. " It's incredible, you're exactly the same. You're more beautiful."

" But how . . . ? " said Helen, clutching his arm, and everyone began to laugh.

" I lost my address book," the man said—he was an American. " The one with your married name in it. I couldn't remember it. I thought, This is the worst thing that has ever happened, returning to England after all these years and the one person I can't find is Helen. But then, of course, I realised that Dorothy would know, and I called her, and she said you'd be here today."

" Isn't it marvellous? " said their hostess. " I couldn't believe it when I heard his voice. I was going to ring you up, then I thought no, it would be such a lovely surprise."

" Give me a drink, someone," said Helen. " Let me sit down, I'm in a flutter. Ralph, I don't know where to begin . . . How long is it? "

Ralph Kuchinsky had been at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, a friend of Dorothy's brother. Helen, who had known Dorothy's family since childhood, had met him at their house on her nineteenth birthday, and he had become one of the three men with whom, at that time, she was more or less in love. She had enjoyed him more than either of the others, but at the same time had been less able to take him seriously because of the excessively romantic approach which made him speak too easily of marriage. To Helen marriage was still something remote, far too serious

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for them ever to attain together. She was capable of many absurdities but she did not have the kind of mind which fools itself, so that to her it was always evident that she and Ralph were playing. But he came from so far away, he seemed so grown-up and confident compared to many of her friends, he was so frankly passionate—in spite of thinking of him as something of a joke, she had hovered very near the brink of commitment with him. Then Ralph had gone to France for six months, leaving her almost sure that they would become lovers on his return—and while he was out of England she had met Roger.

Heavens! she thought now, reaching for a cigarette to hide the laughter which was about to break out. "Does he remember Cavendish Square?" They had walked round and round Cavendish Square on the night when she told him that it was no good, she had fallen in love with Roger. Ralph's arm had been round her, she had leaned against him as though she were fainting, they had both wept. "Oh why, why?" she had sobbed, and had turned it into, "why does life make us do these awful things to each other?" But what she had nearly said was, "Why, why didn't you make me go to bed with you last summer so that I could have had that, too?" Goodness, how sad she had felt that evening, and how she had enjoyed it.

"Tell me everything," she said now to the stranger on Dorothy's hearth-rug. "Are you still writing plays; are you still living in Iowa; are you married?"

"Oh, my God, do you mean to say that I haven't written to anyone since I got married? Married and two kids—twin sons. I'll inflict photographs on you in a minute. And New York now, and no more plays—I've got bills to pay. You remember I had a favourite uncle, manufactured textiles? Well, I've gone in with him, on the promotion side."

"Do you enjoy it? Are you happy?"

But Dorothy called them in to lunch before he could answer, and the talk became general.

He looks happy, thought Helen. Dear Ralph, how glad I am.

He was shorter than Roger, squarer, with a smooth yellow-brown skin and dark friendly eyes. He had become a little fatter and had lost the slight English accent he had picked up at Oxford, but he still wore clothes more English than American in style. He was no less amusing than he used to be—though Roger, who did not like wisecracks, would probably find his humour too slick. But Roger would appreciate him when he talked seriously. Helen had forgotten how well informed Ralph was, on such a wide range of subjects, or perhaps this was

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something he had developed since she last saw him; listening to him, she felt a proprietorial pride in his easy and accomplished talk. An old flame who had turned into the kind of friend they valued—they must have him to dinner next week, she decided.

But Ralph was still more impetuous than she was. He had hired a car for his stay in England, and when the party broke up he took it for granted that he would be driving her home. "I must see your home," he said. "That's going to be a fascinating part of this trip, seeing what's become of you all," and the talk veered to comparisons between their early ambitions and their achievements. That the past they called up was shared by Dorothy as well made it a safer possession than it would otherwise have been, so that Helen got into Ralph's car with hardly a thought of that other car: the little green sports car he had once owned, with its gear lever in such an obtrusive position. Bump-bump they had gone on to the grass verges of country lanes, and the engine had ticked in the silence after he had switched off the ignition. "Let's get out, let me spread the rug on the grass; please, Helen; please, darling."

"No, Ralph, oh please sweet Ralph, please don't, oh darling we must go back."

"This is more like it," he said, when he had manœuvred out of Dorothy's mews, his voice suddenly more intimate. "Now tell me about you—the real things. *You* are happy?"

"Very, very happy. I don't know anyone luckier than I am. And you?"

"I'm glad about you—I really am. If you hadn't been happy it would have killed me."

"And you are too, surely?"

"Well, I like my business. I didn't expect to, but I do. And the kids are great, and Stella's a very sweet girl." He spoke curtly.

"So you are happy too."

"I guess you could say that."

Oh! thought Helen, and decided not to ask any more just then. If something was wrong—oh dear, poor Ralph . . . and her already cheerful mood gave an almost imperceptible lilt. For the rest of the drive they spoke about the circumstances of their lives in a less personal way.

"Now this is a beautiful room," he said, as he followed her into her drawing-room. "No one but you could have made this room."

"Darling Ralph, you always did exaggerate. It's a perfectly ordinary English middle-class drawing-room, furnished with

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cast-off pieces from the in-laws and bargains from the Portobello Road. There's hardly a thing here which I would have chosen if I'd had a free hand."

"It's got something about it, all the same. Here, let me take your coat."

Helen turned her shoulders so that he could slip it off from behind, but his hands came to rest on them and he pivoted her gently so that they were face to face, very close. She was flustered by this, but she felt that to pull away sharply would be ungracious, so she smiled at him and said gently, "What fun that you are in our house at last."

"Let me kiss you," he said. "Let me kiss you just once, for old times' sake."

"Oh, my dear, what nonsense," and quickly she pressed her cheek against his, then moved away to the other side of the room. There was a little Victorian armchair at her disposal, and a sofa. She sat down on the sofa.

"You'll find cigarettes in that box," she said. "Throw me one."

Ralph brought the box over, sat down beside her, and put his arm round her shoulders.

"No no," she said. "I want a cigarette." And then, feeling his arm tighten she thought, Oh, Lord, I suppose I ought to stop this quickly. It seemed absurd to put up a defence against a threat which was not serious—indeed, which did not exist—so she was smiling when she withdrew a little and said, "Look, Ralph, I meant it when I said I was happy. I do love Roger, and I've turned into a very faithful kind of woman."

Ralph laughed, and she laughed with him. "I know," he said. "And *I* meant it when I said I was glad for you. I still love you, you see."

"Good heavens, you haven't changed a bit! You're still a terrible, exaggerating old phoney. Is it just the English climate which does this to you, or do you carry on the same way at home?"

"It's you that does it, but never mind, I'll be good. Look, I'll go sit over here and just gaze at you."

He went to a chair across the hearth-rug and sat leaning forward, his hands dangling between his knees, his dark eyes, half amused and half questioning, fixed on hers.

But why won't he stop this? thought Helen. Can't he understand that I *like* being a happily married woman? And what terrible timing, anyway, barely three hours since we met again and in my own drawing-room at that . . . Her face was a little flushed and her own eyes were sparkling as they stared back into his. Now, what next? she was wondering.

But after a few seconds Ralph lowered his gaze and said

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quietly, " You're dead right. This is a crazy way to go on and I won't do it again, I promise. I'll become a model of discretion right now, on one condition."

" What's that? "

" That you'll have dinner with me tonight. We can go to a theatre or a movie or something—you dictate. But I'm all tensed up with the thrill of being back here—you don't know what it means to me—and I've got a barren evening ahead of me. This is a big experience for me, and it'll go flat if I have to sit around by myself."

" Well, I was going to wash my hair . . ."

" *Helen!* That old teenager's excuse—I thought better of you."

Again they laughed together. So long as it's a joke, thought Helen vaguely.

" All right, I'd love to have dinner with you, thank you very much. And I'm going to wash my hair *now*, so there! "

By the time Ralph came to pick her up, Helen's mood had steadied. She had been startled by her face in the mirror under the turban of towel: that near-smile and that extra glow to her complexion. She remembered the deliberately graceful pose into which she had fallen on the sofa, the way in which she had lowered her eyelashes and turned her head: I was flirting with him, she thought, disgusted with herself. Did I drink too much at lunch? And here I am, putting on scent. But I always wear scent when I go out. No, I don't, I often forget it, and I won't use it now.

To behave as though she wished to attract Ralph when no man's response to her mattered in the least except Roger's—it was as though she had skidded for a moment into being another kind of woman, silly and vulgar. And of course Ralph was not still in love with her. She remembered how he had never been able to resist a situation: if a certain emotion seemed apt to him in a certain situation, then he would produce it. In this situation, where she represented his youth and his freedom and his nostalgic love for Oxford and England, it was apt that he should hint at dissatisfaction with his marriage and so on . . . Oh, it's quite absurd, she told herself. Imagine being in bed with Ralph— It would be obscene.

So she went downstairs thinking that all the same he was a nice person, and that it would be amusing to spend an evening with him. She opened the door to him with a pleasure which felt free of any trace of excitement.

Ralph, too, appeared to have moved on to a calmer level. He

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began to talk at once about national characteristics, then about American politics, and by the time they were sitting at the restaurant table—there had been no more talk of a theatre—they were at ease as old friends, with no undercurrents.

It was curious that to dine alone with a man other than her husband should restore to a meal eaten in a restaurant so much of the sense of occasion that Helen could remember from her girlhood. If she had come to this place with Roger, meeting friends, she would probably have wondered why they were sitting cramped at a small table, intruded on however gently by other people's talk, eating elaborate food which did not retain the taste of its ingredients, when they could have been enjoying a better dinner in the comfort of their own dining-room. But this evening she was stimulated by her surroundings. The subdued buzz and tinkle, the colour of the carnations in the fluted vase, the wine-waiter's ceremonial bearing—she relished them all, and she was conscious of how she looked across the table: a pretty, elegant, animated woman, with a presentable man who was appreciating her company.

After dinner Ralph suggested that they should go on somewhere and dance. Helen was surprised, and felt humbled by her surprise. Because Roger did not enjoy dancing she had relegated her own pleasure in it to the past, but she had not realised until this moment that she had become someone who did not know of a place to suggest.

"What about the Blue Room?" Ralph asked.

"We aren't members—we aren't members of any night club. You don't seem to realise, my dear, how middle-aged I've become."

But Ralph, it appeared, was a member; a friend of his in New York who often visited London had lent him his card. "Would you like to go there, is it a place you like?" he asked, and Helen had to admit that she did not know.

Dark blue velvet walls on either side of a long passage with a purple carpet; a huge bowl of parma violets with a miniature fountain playing out of its centre on the receptionist's desk; a lady's room lined with quilted midnight-blue satin, smelling of Chanel No. 5 and deodorants. There was a grey poodle tied to a chair in there, whimpering for its mistress, and the attendant was knitting a bed-jacket: it might have been only a week ago that Helen had last offered comforting words to such a poodle and dropped half a crown into a glass ashtray for such an attendant. She pushed open the padded door to rejoin Ralph with a delightful sensation that her past had been running parallel with her present all this time; that she only had to go

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th ough such a door to be back in it, much younger than she had come to think of herself and as familiar with the pattern of an evening like this as anyone there.

Ralph had authority in a night club. He was given the table of his choice without demur, as though the wad of five-pound notes which Helen had glimpsed when he paid the bill for dinner were making a visible bulge in his pocket. Helen rested her arm on the back of the banquette to which they were led—it looked pretty there, so white and graceful against the dark material—and looked round her. "Who can it be who designs these places?" she asked: all that velvet and satin, all that padding and quilting; the small gilt stars studding the blue walls, and the larger stars in the blue ceiling, shedding dim light on the dance floor. It was hideous, a vulgarly conceived incubator for the purpose of hatching money out of alcohol and sex, but she looked at it with pleasure.

"Good old night clubs," she said. "They never change. It's such fun to be back in one again."

When they danced she felt light in Ralph's arms, holding herself a little away from him, moving so easily that he did not have to exert any pressure to guide her. She was dancing simply for the pleasure of doing it again. Nothing in the evening, so far, had made it seem necessary to establish this; it was only a slightly comic prudence that was making her convey it to Ralph by the cool touch of her fingers and the way she separated from him when the music stopped. And he followed her lead, making no attempt to hold her closer or to keep his hand on her waist, so that she felt that together they were handling this physical contact discreetly and well. She had half expected him to take advantage of it, and was so pleased with him for not doing so that when they were back at their table, sitting side by side, she moved a little nearer him, her arm just touching his in friendly confidence.

"It's wonderful, doing things with you," he said. "You always did have such a talent for enjoyment. That's one of the rubs with Stella and me—she's a worrier, she finds it hard to relax."

"I expect she's more serious-minded than I am. And you can't judge by tonight, anyway, because this is a treat for me so of course I'm enjoying it. I'm horrid sometimes, in the ordinary way."

"I bet you never tell Roger that champagne gives him indigestion, just as he's taking his first sip, in front of a lot of people."

"Oh, Ralph! She doesn't do things like that?"

"She does too. It sounds kind of corny, that nagging wife

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deal, but I can tell you—oh, what's the use? I won't bore you with all that."

"But I'm not bored . . ." and soon, her elbow on the table and her cheek on her hand, Helen was gazing gravely into Ralph's face, listening to the story of his marriage. She thought him disloyal to tell it, and she disliked the self-pity with which he spoke, but the intimacy of this talk, the flattery, the wisdom of her own comments, so carefully fair to the unknown Stella, all combined to make the occasion more interesting. The position in which she was now sitting had removed the touch of Ralph's sleeve from her bare arm. In that warm room her skin could not really have become cold, but after a minute or two it felt as though it had. With most of her mind she was listening; with a small part of it she was telling herself that it would be a mistake to lean back again so that their former closeness was restored; and in a moment of absent-mindedness, less than three minutes later, she had leaned back.

The next time they danced Helen was distinctly more conscious of Ralph's awareness of her; the discretion of their dancing was no longer making a distance between them. The lightness of their fingers' touching had become as significant as a close clasp. Helen smiled with lowered eyelids, moving her head as though inadvertently to avoid Ralph's cheek. She could feel what he was up to now, and she was *not* letting him embrace her more closely, whatever sensations she herself might be experiencing.

She had a good head for alcohol. She was drinking more than usual, but she did not get perceptibly drunk. As the evening went on she was sure that it was not the wine which was making the dim lights, the music, the plushiness and gleam of the decor act on her as they were intended to act, so that vulgarity was transmuted into luxury, banality sounded melodious, and the intimacy of that banquette became so warmly real. She was no longer bothering about whether she approved of Ralph's attitudes or agreed with his opinions. More often than not she did, but there were moments when she thought, How odd, or, But that's silly, or, He's very conceited; and although these judgments registered quite clearly, they had no bearing on her mood or on her increasing fondness for him. They meant something, perhaps, in relation to her and Ralph, but they meant nothing in relation to the evening.

"It's so strange, when you think of it," she said softly at one point. "Spending all one's life with one person. I wouldn't have it otherwise for anything in the world—I'd die rather than be married to anyone but Roger. But meeting you again, being with someone else I know really well—and we did know

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each other well, didn't we? I mean, you know things about me that even Roger doesn't know . . . I think it's something people ought to do more often. I feel as though I were having a delicious breath of fresh air."

She knew as she said it that she was crossing the borderline of discretion, but why not? It was true, after all. And she knew when Ralph put his hand over hers that she ought to draw away, but it felt so good, the warm palm soothing on the back of her hand, friendly rather than amorous, that instead she turned her own palm upwards and closed her fingers lightly over his. What could be a more natural expression of their relationship this evening than this comfortable, unurgent contact? When Ralph's fingers closed down and his face suddenly came nearer hers in the half-darkness so that there was nothing for it but to take her hand away, she felt cheated.

It was late before Ralph said, "Let's have one more dance before we go," and this time there was no pretence. In the first moment, before she could establish any distance, he pulled her against him, he pressed his cheek to hers, and Helen felt a sleepy sweetness rising in her. Not to enjoy the sweetness seemed perverse. Just for half a minute, she thought, and relaxed in his arms, smiling at this rediscovery of pure, sensual pleasure. But when she felt the pressure of his desire against her thigh she woke herself up and pulled away from him. "Sweet Ralph," she said, meaning to speak lightly, but her voice was huskier than she expected it to be, "this is no way to behave. We are both beginning to be drunk, and it's time you took me home."

Back in the cloakroom she took longer than she needed to comb her hair and touch up her face, talking about the weather with the attendant as she did so, trying to sound as though she were talking with her greengrocer or someone at the post office. It was necessary that this old redhaired woman should think what a nice, sober, well-conducted lady she was: someone to whom this evening was no different from any part of her daily life. She decided that when she got into the taxi—Ralph had not used his car because of parking problems—she would lean back in her own corner, calm and natural, and tell Ralph how much she and Roger were looking forward to their holiday.

She did this, too. And Ralph leaned back in *his* corner, which was odd. She had expected him to take up a strategic position in the middle of the seat. She was not sure whether it was uncomfortable or comic to be operating so distinctly on two levels simultaneously: to think approvingly, Good, he is going to keep to his own side, and at the same time to feel forlorn at this lonely way of sitting. The forlorn feeling must be quashed,

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since she *really did not want* any nonsense, but nevertheless, when Ralph reached out and took her hand it became much more pleasant to be in this taxi with him.

"What a lovely evening you have given me," she said.

"It's you who made it lovely. I only wish I could believe . . ."

"Believe what?"

"Well, I wish I could believe that you were willing to make it even more lovely." There was a trace of a question mark at the end of the sentence.

"Ralph dear, you know how I feel about you; you know how happy I am to see you again." She made her voice specially warm and affectionate to counteract the harshness of what she must say. "But I've told you how things are with me, and everything I said is perfectly true, it really is. I'm sorry, my dear, but please . . ."

"I know, darling. Don't worry, I'm not going to spoil things." His voice, too, was warm and loving, his hand was so comforting on hers.

She felt gratitude and tenderness towards him. It *had* been a lovely evening, entertaining, refreshing, spiced by the stimulant of feeling herself desired, and now sweetened by his understanding that he should not push things too far. So when, after she had moved nearer to him and was leaning lightly against him, he suddenly put his arms round her, pulled her to him quite roughly, and began to kiss first her neck, then her averted cheek, and then, after a short struggle, her mouth, she was tumbled into an absurd confusion.

The levels multiplied. But he said he wouldn't! one part of her was protesting in naïve dismay; another part was taking ironic note of this girlish reaction; another part was thinking calmly, We'll be home soon, nothing much can happen in this cab; and meanwhile her body was willingly dissolving.

It was the dissolving which seemed to be prevailing. When Ralph's tongue forced her lips apart and his hand closed on her left breast, Helen felt for the first time that evening not only awareness of his desire, but the stirring of her own. Oh God, she thought, I'd forgotten! It was so long since she had been embraced by someone new, for the first time. This was not—of course it was not, how could she have forgotten?—the relaxed and easy pleasure in which nothing was disturbed if she murmured between kisses, "Did you remember to collect your watch?" This was as reckless and urgent as it was sweet, and to feel it again was like slaking thirst. He feels fat, he feels soft, she noticed, but how he felt was rapidly coming to be beside the point. He bore forward on to her, thrusting her back so that he was half

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lying on her, and grabbing one of her hands he began to thrust it down towards his crotch.

She had been playing all evening with his desire, but now, when its awakening answer flared up in her, she was horrified. She had to stop it, she knew. Her shoulder strap had slipped, and when for a moment he left her mouth free in order to kiss her body, she wrenched away from him.

"Stop it, Ralph," she said hoarsely. "Stop it at once, we can't do this. If you try to go on I shall hate you."

"Do you really mean that?" he whispered.

Feeling as though she were pushing aside a heavy weight, Helen sat up and nodded. "Yes, I do," she said. "I'm terribly sorry, Ralph, but I do."

Slowly, shaking his head as though to clear it, Ralph moved away from her to the other end of the seat. "It's my fault," he said in a muffled voice.

"It's all right, but it would be too stupid. Where have we got to?"

He looked out of the taxi at landmarks unfamiliar to him and did not answer, leaning forward with his hands dangling between his knees, continuing to stare out of the window while she straightened her dress and smoothed her hair. There were still about ten minutes of the drive left, she saw. She was feeling slightly sick and she wished that he would say something forgiving.

"I suppose we drank too much," she said, but his silence continued, seeming to her heavy with pain, frustration and reproof, filling her with guilt. Oh, poor Ralph! What nonsense, she told herself. He isn't a boy. It doesn't really matter to him whether he gets me into bed or not; but she could not banish an atmosphere brewed as much by her own body as by his. She did not doubt that she had done what she had to do—but, Oh how sad, she kept saying to herself, Oh, what a shame.

Supposing that she had not stopped him? He would soon be going away again, Roger would never have known: it would have been just this one evening, just this one situation allowed to run freely to its natural end. For an instant the emptiness of her house flashed through her mind—her wide bed, so soft, on which if she were now to say . . . Roger's bed. Was she mad? "Give me a cigarette," she said quickly.

In the last few minutes of the drive they restored, between them, a show of calm, speaking of Ralph's plans for the rest of his visit, but all the time Helen was thinking that the moment was approaching when they would say good night. It was so sad that his voice had become polite and cool, so sad that if she

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were to take his hand again he might misunderstand. She caught herself thinking, I could ask him in, just to restore the friendliness, and was shocked that she had thought it, shocked that she continued to argue, But he would understand, now, that it meant nothing. The only safe thing was to shut her eyes and say nothing. But something would have to happen when the cab pulled up; something either warm or cold. The evening was not done with yet.

When the taxi stopped she thought for a moment, with dismay, that he was simply going to open the door and let her get out, scrambling past his knees, but he got out with her. "Have you got your key?" he asked, and put his hand on her elbow—that was better—as they crossed the pavement, went up the steps.

What am I going to say? she wondered as she groped in her bag. No, I can't ask him in—how can I after being so definite?—it's out of the question. But if he . . . She did not envisage what Ralph might do. Plead with her? Argue with her? Stick his foot in the door and force his way in? He would not do anything, of course, but as she put her key in the lock she found herself thinking, very clearly, Well, if he does come in—that's that.

She turned towards him, standing in the half-open door, waiting. Ralph took her hand, raised it to his lips, and kissed it. Then, gently, he kissed her again on the mouth. "Good-bye, darling Helen," he said. "Thank you for spending this evening with me. It's been wonderful." And quite cheerfully he went down the steps and got into the waiting cab.

In her hall Helen sat down on the chair by the telephone, kicked off her shoes, and said aloud, "Phew! What a relief." Ralph had understood that she had meant what she said—of course he had. Given the kind of people they both were, he could not have done otherwise. The kind of people they both were? . . . "Well, if he does come in—that's that." On her bed. On Roger's bed. Oh God, she thought when she was upstairs, it would have been obscene. Roger was the only man she could bear to have on that bed, or on any bed—and that was true, so how right Ralph had been to understand that she had meant what she said.

Tomorrow Roger would come home, and she could have gone down on her knees then and there in thankfulness for the welcome she would be able to give her darling heart. But when Helen was taking off her dress and the zip stuck halfway down, she felt such a violent irritation that she exclaimed loudly, "Oh, to hell with the damn thing," and with a fierce jerk she ripped six inches of zip out of the fabric so that she was never able to wear that dress again.

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CONCRETE ISLAND

For a long moment she stared at the thing lying in his palm

BY J. ROGER BAKER

WHEN he found the first one, Simon didn't tell anybody. He tucked it away in the pocket of his dark grey overall suit and joined the other children who were drawing maps in the sand. That night, while his mother wasn't looking, he slipped it under his pillow. Jane kissed him good night and closed the door. As the light slowly dimmed to a sleep-inducing dark blue he sat up and, leaning on one chubby arm, examined his discovery.

It was most interesting: soft without being squashy; bendy but with no spring to it: a beautiful new colour, and the scent was strange. He sniffed it again, it made him feel deeply uneasy somewhere inside. It reminded him of something, but he couldn't remember what. At five you don't worry overmuch about things like that and sleep comes quickly.

The next day its colour was darker, almost black. It got nasty and squashy later, so Simon threw it away and went to look for another.

After kicking about in the sandpit for a while, he dodged across the paved playing area and down the vertical, white-painted ladder that led to the lower level. This was forbidden territory for the children. The sun was very hot.

He was standing on a triangular platform, two sides of which were walled—the short wall he'd just climbed down and a much higher windowless one. The third side ended with a precipitous drop to the twenty-four-stream motorway below.

Looking round to make sure no one had followed, Simon made for the acute angle where the walls joined. They didn't quite meet at first, and there was just enough room for a small boy to creep between them for a little way.

"Simon, darling, whatever have you got there?" Jane asked, when he came in dusty and panting for his midday nourishment.

"Oh, nothing much, Mummy," he said. But his actions so clearly denied this that Jane laughed. He kept one hand behind his back and was walking sideways towards his room.

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She bent down, bringing her face close to his. "Come along, young man," she coaxed, "show Mummy what you've got."

Very reluctantly he brought his arm from behind his back and, holding out his hand, opened the fist.

For a long moment she stared at the thing lying in his palm.

Finally she spoke. "Where did you find it?" she asked, hoping that Simon wouldn't see that she was pale and trembling, trying to keep her voice steady.

Simon looked sheepish. His mother would be cross if he confessed he had gone down to the forbidden lower level so near the big drop to the motorway. "Oh, out there," he said casually.

"I see. Would you like to show Daddy where you found it?"

Simon burst into tears. "Don't be cross, Mummy. Please."

Suddenly she put both arms round him, tightly. "I'm not cross, darling. Don't worry about it any more." Her own tears fell on to his bright swirl of hair. "Go and wash your hands," she said briskly, drawing away and turning towards the window so that Simon could not see her glistening cheeks.

She looked at the thing again, now in her own hand. It lay across her palm like a cruel slash on the map of its creases. Her first impulse was to throw it away, put it into the refuse disposer, let it be ground to dust with the cans and cartons. But she knew that to hide such a discovery was a capital crime. The Authority was strict on this. She decided to leave a decision until Robert came home. She stood motionless, looking out of the window.

The flat was not, comparatively speaking, high; just thirty-two floors up. Far below, the wide motorway ribboned by, carrying traffic on a nonstop journey from the north of Scotland to the shores of the Mediterranean. Under the glaring sun it was like a band of light cutting down through England, leaping over the channel, bisecting France, where it was joined by similar routes from Scandinavia, Russia, and Spain.

It was bright outside, even through the dark glasses that were compulsory for everyone. As far as she could see, the light bounced from square glittering blocks: flats, offices, factories, some glass-walled. In between were the shopping levels, connected by graceful bridges or flights of steps to play levels, sport levels, and unused patches all paved with pink slabs. In the playing areas were shining sandpits—fine-grained silvery sand—and swimming-pools lined with glossy blue tiles.

This was England from coast to coast, a concrete island. Even the swollen hills of Wales and Scotland had been tamed into squares, angles, and cubes by rearing skyscrapers, concrete, and glass. This was Europe.

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"What shall you do with it, Mummy?"

Jane broke from her reverie to see Simon standing beside her. "Well, I think we'll put it on this shelf for Daddy to see when he comes home from work." She made an effort to speak lightly, as if he had merely found an odd-shaped piece of metal or unusually-coloured chip of glass. One thing she had to find out, though.

She drew a tumbler of water and dissolved a large spoonful of white powder in it. As Simon drank the milk, she asked him casually, "Did you show it to anyone else, dear?"

"Oh no. It's my secret. My secret," he repeated, pleased that Mummy was more interested in the thing than where he'd found it. He added confidently, "That's three I've found."

Her stomach contracted in another spasm of fear. "The third! What did you do with the others?" Her mind raced; supposing he had left them lying about, in the lift, the sandpit, floating in the pool.

"I threw them away. They got nasty after a bit. They went in that grinding thing." He paused thoughtfully. "It was funny," he went on, "the first one went all black and squashy, but the other one got yellowish and dry. What are they, Mum?"

"I don't know, Simon. Perhaps Daddy will tell us," she said quickly, lest he divine her tension. "Now run along and have a swim. But come in before the rain," she added. During the hot months of summer, the operatives at the Ministry of Weather arranged for a two-hour rain shower from six to eight each evening to clean the miles of concrete and freshen the atmosphere.

Simon scudded out, swinging his little towel. He loved swimming and was quite capable of using the deeper pool designed for adults.

Jane looked again at the thing Simon had brought in so innocently. If he really hadn't mentioned it to anyone they might yet escape The Authority.

One of Simon's conversations with his father came back to her. The boy was very bright and his questions were endless, making Robert proud.

"Daddy—what do you mean when you say something blossoms?"

"Turns from being plain and ordinary into something pretty," he explained.

"It's a funny word, Daddy," Simon persisted. "Where does it come from?" Simon always asked where words came from, ever since Robert had told him that the tall buildings around were called skyscrapers because when they were first built hundreds of years ago people thought they really did touch the sky.

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Robert looked away; he had to say he didn't know, which he always hated doing. "I wish he'd ask about something straightforward like sex," he complained later to Jane. They laughed. Now the joke was springing back.

Robert came home hot and tired. He worked in the lower strata of the Science Ministry, which meant he shared a room with thirty-nine others high up in a glass-fronted building. The higher one rose status-wise the lower, cooler, and more shaded one's room was.

Jane dropped a dark brown pill into a tumbler of water; it quickly fizzed into a pale-coloured beer. Robert drank gratefully, mopping his face.

Jane knew that any sort of preamble would be useless and irritating, so she simply took the thing from the shelf and held it out to Robert. "Simon found this."

Robert stared and slowly took it. "Oh no . . . not Simon," he murmured quietly, "but where . . . how?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask him." Her fear began to surface making her snappy, making her pace about. "I didn't want to frighten him."

Automatically Robert sipped his beer. "What are we going to do?" Jane asked quietly, breaking the long silence.

"Does anyone else know about this?"

"I don't think so. He said not, anyway."

"Good . . . good. Then perhaps we can risk ignoring it. I must think."

They drew closer together.

The others had gone. Only Simon and Sammy Probick were left at the pool.

"Well, maybe you can go faster than me," said Sammy spitefully, drawing himself out of the water some seconds after Simon. They had been racing. "But I bet you daren't go down there." He pointed dramatically towards the steps that led down to the lower level.

"Been down lots of times," Simon replied, looking superior.

"I mean by yourself."

"I have been down by myself, lots of times." Seeing the other's disbelieving expression, Simon went further. "And I found something down there that you don't know about. Something secret."

"Huh! What?"

"Shan't tell you."

"No, 'cos there isn't any secret. And you *haven't* been down there."

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" Yes, I have, *I have*," Simon stamped.

" Let's see you go down there then." Simon hesitated, and Sammy Probick pressed his advantage, " I dare you."

The unavoidable challenge.

" But I don't understand. What possible harm could it do—and to a little boy like that? " Jane complained.

" From the point of view of The Authority it could lead to the tapping of subconscious memories, remind people of the things they have been bred to forget, breed discontent," Robert said.

" But even I can't remember seeing one of those things before, so I don't see how Simon possibly could."

" Yes, my dearest Jane—" Robert put his arm round her narrow shoulders—" but you do guess what it is, don't you? "

" Well, I think I know."

" Simon doesn't. And that's the idea. To breed a generation that knows nothing of what it was like before "—he gestured towards the endless army of buildings outside—" before all this. Not only is it economically impossible to let things like this—" he picked up the thing—" multiply, but if people saw them their memories would be jolted, it could lead to madness, to anarchy."

" You're exaggerating. I'm sure it couldn't do so much harm."

He put his hands on her arms and turned her towards him. " Look, Jane, you know how people see visions when they have been deprived of water for too long—mirages of fountains and pools—well, can you imagine a whole population behaving like that once their memory has been sharpened into remembering something they have been *trained* to do without? That's why The Authority is so stern, so . . . unyielding." His voice shook.

" I suppose so. But only we know about it, so it'll be all right, won't it? Won't it, Robert? "

" Of course," he said slowly, " the source must be destroyed. I shall have to get Simon to show me where it comes from and do it myself. It we leave it too long, it will be too late—especially after this evening's rain."

" We'll go together," Jane said. She started preparing their meal.

" But remember," Robert added, " if Simon has told anyone, we must expect . . . callers . . ."

Mrs. Probick stood at the top of the steps, a towering figure in her bulky black trousers.

" What are you doing down there, you little monkey? " she shouted, her voice coarse and loud.

Sammy started wailing at once. " It was him," he cried. " He

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made me." Simon came into view, emerging apparently from the angle between the walls.

All Mrs. Probick's jealousy of Jane and Robert flared. Robert was more intelligent than her husband and had a better job which entitled him to a lower flat and to more holidays.

"You just wait. I'll tell your mother," she shouted, dragging her own son up the last few steps. Simon climbed up slowly, carrying something in his fist.

"And what have you got there . . . ?" The woman started and then realised what it must be. "Sammy, come here," she screamed, horror in her voice. "I don't want you ever to go near that nasty little boy again."

She backed away, pulling Sammy with her protectively. "I'll have to let someone know about this," she murmured, the anger in her voice and eyes instantly replaced by apprehension and fright . . .

Robert hated letting Simon know he couldn't answer any of his questions. His job, petty though it was, gave him a reputation even among his adult friends, for a wide range of knowledge.

"But, Daddy, it's got such a funny smell too," Simon was saying. "It makes me think of something. But I don't know what." Seeing his parents' expression, "Something nice, though," he added reassuringly.

"You see," Robert whispered to Jane. She nodded.

"Simon, I want you to try to forget all about it after you've shown me where you found it. Then I want you to promise us faithfully that you will never go there again, or touch one any more. And if you do find another you must tell us straight away." Robert spoke kindly, but firmly.

"All right, Daddy," Simon agreed trustingly. "Mrs. Probick was ever so cross when she saw it this afternoon." He yawned, ready for bed.

Jane gripped Robert's hand beneath the table. "Not Mrs. Probick."

"*Did you show her?*" Robert demanded, more sharply than he had intended.

Simon realised something was very wrong. His bottom lip trembled. Hesitatingly, he explained what had happened. "I didn't even have a chance to show it to Sammy," he whimpered at the end of his recital.

The rain came, thundering on the roofs and roads.

"Get along to bed, Simon," said Robert gently. The little boy went out miserably.

"This is it then, Jane," said Robert, going to her. "We should have reported it at once. Delay has made it much worse."

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"Couldn't we . . . couldn't we pretend nothing has happened?" sobbed Jane. "We'll say it is just spite from that woman. She's always been jealous."

"The Authority knows well—and so do we, my love—that people don't use things of this nature just for spite. It's far too serious. Why, the woman is probably genuinely terrified and regards it as her duty to report it as she would a fatal accident, or a murder."

"What will happen?" Jane's voice was scarcely audible above the hiss of the rain. "They won't take him away . . .?"

Robert thought for a moment. "Obviously they won't allow him to stay here, mixing with the other children. Perhaps they will take him away for only a short time—for what they call a . . . a Cure. That is if they are kind. Otherwise he—he becomes an exile."

"Then we will go with him, wherever it is, whatever it may mean for us."

Through the rain they saw far below a long black transporter hover above the courtyard of their block and settle on the pavement, now gleaming dark pink. Four men, foreshortened shapes, got out. With them they could see the squat figure of Mrs. Probick. She was pointing.

Together they went in to Simon. He looked at them nervously over the sheet but, seeing them both smiling down, he relaxed. Jane kissed him.

"Daddy?" he murmured sleepily, "what's a monkey?" Jane turned away.

"I'll tell you in the morning," Robert whispered, bending to kiss him good night. They went out, closing the door quietly.

The bell buzzed sharply. Robert turned. "We mustn't pretend, Jane. Put the thing on the table. It's better that way." He paused. "They might be kind," he said, going to open the front door.

Outside the rain screamed down, a scientific cleansing operation: there was no vegetation on the concrete island to need its nourishment. Jane went to the shelf and with a shudder put the long green blade of grass on the table.

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"I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

ISAAC NEWTON

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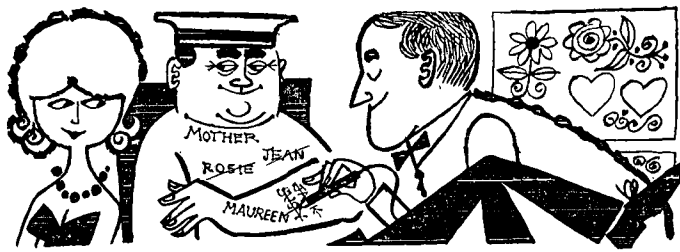

PINPRICK PORTRAIT

He was an artist—only the form his art took happened to be the tattoo.

Late in life,
Wishing to provide himself with a lurid past
He had his chest tattooed with
Various
Regrettable
Designs.

RICHARD MALLETT, *Manufactured Evidence*

Sue for Breach of Promise

" There's a lot of covering up names and altering emblems, of course," said the tattooist, " and inferior work. Hongkong's all right, but there's a lot of abominable work done in Egypt. Japan, too. I've only been asked to take ' Mother ' off once, and I refused. I don't care how bad a man's mother is, I won't be a party to that. And I won't do anything obscene, although I sometimes have to cover it up."

The next customer was Merchant Navy, aged 19. He wanted *Jack and Sue*, covered up on his left arm. His present girl was called Maureen . . .

" Flower here and some leaves," said the tattooist. " Can't do it under a dollar."

" All right," said the boy.

THE TIMES, *Tattooing—A Fine Art*

Then I saw the Congo, creeping through the black,
Cutting through the jungle with a golden track.
Then along that riverbank
A thousand miles
Tattooed cannibals danced in files;

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Then I heard the boom of the blood-lust song
And a thigh-bone beating on a tin-pan gong . . .
Be careful what you do,
Or Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo,
And all of the other
Gods of the Congo,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you.

VACHEL LINDSAY, *The Congo*

Lumbar Lagoon

" Great Scots," Don José exclaimed. " You're gorgeous! " He walked as quickly as he could, without falling, to bring more light. " Don't move, sir. I pray you. Don't move." He placed lights on the tables all around Heller, every inch of whose skin from belly band to throat, front and back, arms and torso, was incomparably tattooed in many colours. " My dear Heller," the doctor gasped, " how absolutely and completely a work of art you are! "

" My tattoos? " Heller responded foggily.

" Yes, yes."

Dr. Vicuña turned him around slowly and rose to the right shoulderblade area, where a thrilling tropical sunset spilt gilt overpainting upon the waters of a lagoon which was remote from all but continuing dreams of men.

" Oh! Oh! I have *never !* How utterly magnificent! "

. . . Three great silver dolphins were breaking water in a tremendous leap up Heller's right leg while crashing along his right thigh there came a long outrigger carrying six exultant Polynesians.

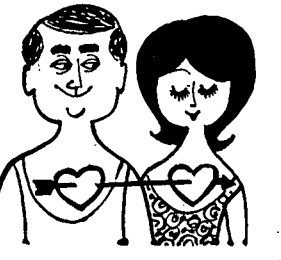
RICHARD CONDON, *A Talent for Loving*

Knee Caption

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I set her on my pacing steed
And nothing else saw all day long,
For, tattooed on her knees she had
EATING PEOPLE IS WRONG!

La Belle Dame, with apologies



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Anything Goes

" ' Emma,' he said softly, ' may I have permission to do anything absolutely whatsoever at all with you? '

" ' Oh, Willy, Willy,' I cried. ' Anything! '

" And then," said Emma Fleet, " he brought out all his boxes and bottles of inks and stencils and his bright silver tattoo needles."

" Tattoo needles? "

The doctor fell back in his chair. " He tattooed you? "

" He tattooed me."

" He was a tattoo artist? "

" He was, he is, an artist. Only the form his art takes happens to be the tattoo."

" And you," said the doctor slowly, " were the canvas for which he had been searching much of his adult life . . ."

" One year alone we spent on my right arm and my left, half a year on my right leg, eight months on my left, in preparation for the grand explosion of bright detail which erupted out along my collarbones and shoulderblades, which fountained upwards from my hips to meet in a glorious July celebration of pinwheels, Titian nudes, Giorgione landscapes, and El Greco cross-indexes of lightning on my façade, prickling with vast electric fires up and down my spine."

RAY BRADBURY, *The Illustrated Woman*

Skin Deep

But why go out to film or play
When I can sit and gaze all day
Enraptured by the clipper ship
Tattooed upon my Chloe's hip?

The slow hours pass, and all I say
Is " Chloe, turn around, I pray,
O, let me see the evening star
Rise on your right-hand scapula . . ."

NICHOLAS DEE, *Advice to Young Maidens to Have Themselves Tattooed*

Crimson Rambler

The most horrible sight of the week. Yesterday I walked behind a girl who had roses tattooed round her ankles. Now I have seen everything.

Girl

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THE VOW

I kept thinking of the lovely sea—
blue waters and blazing sunshine

BY ALBERTO MORAVIA

WHEN the fine weather came, I began to long for the sea again, and for trips to the seaside. I had been ill all the winter and part of the spring, first with Asian influenza and double pneumonia, which nearly resulted in my going to the other world, and then again with the after effects of the flu. Meanwhile the months were going by, and I, shut up in my little car-accessories shop, kept thinking of the sea, the lovely sea with its clean, fine sand and ever-moving, ever-living blue waters and blazing sunshine that scorches and burns but does not make you sweat.

I had such a longing for the sea that I even dreamed about it at night, and as the bathing season drew near I used to go out every morning on the balcony to see what the sky looked like behind St. Peter's. We were now at the end of May, and one Saturday I suggested to Ginetta, my fiancée, that we should go next day to Castelfusano for our first bathe of the year.

We were at an eating-house, with our two families, mine and hers, and the children were asleep in their mothers' arms, and one or two friends of mine were there too. Ginetta's face at once took on a disconcerted expression. "I can't go to the sea," she said. "You must go with some other girl."

"But why?"

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" Go with Tilde, whom you like so much. I'm not coming."

I began to get angry. " What's Tilde got to do with it? Why don't you want to come? "

She bent her head and said nothing. Then, in an authoritative way, her mother broke in, " When you were ill, Ginetta made a vow. She swore that, if you got well, she would give up sea bathing for this year. Now you know why she refuses to come."

This made me feel uncomfortable. On the one hand, I felt I ought to be moved by this vow which proved her affection for me; on the other, however, her vow would ruin my enjoyment of the trip.

" Thank you," I said. " But what necessity was there for this vow? Wasn't penicillin enough for you? "

Immediately there was a chorus of protests from all the women present. " Don't say that . . . Perhaps it was just because of Ginetta's vow that you got better . . . You never know . . ."

I waited until they had calmed down, and then said, " Very well then. But I want to go to the sea and I'm going. You must come too, and break your vow."

" I'm not coming. And I'm not going to break my vow—why, for all you know, you might get ill again."

" I give you permission to break it."

" You needn't even think of such a thing," she said obstinately. " I've told you—go with Tilde."

The thing that irritated me most was her ungraciousness. It almost seemed that she was angry with me because by falling ill, I had, so to speak, forced her to make this vow. So, after a little more bickering, I jumped up abruptly from the table, calling out that I would go with Tilde, since that was what she wanted, and that was that.

I went straight off to the bar where Tilde worked as cashier. This girl Tilde was exactly the opposite of Ginetta. Whereas Ginetta was touchy, nervous, complicated, full of whims and subtleties, Tilde, on the contrary, was simple, unshakable and serene. And, as in character, so also in physical appearance. Ginetta was thin, dark, eager; Tilde fair, plump, and placid.

" Hullo, Tilde," I said to her, " would you like to come to Castelfusano tomorrow? "

I knew that men meant nothing to her, but that she was a glutton for amusement. And indeed she answered, with a smile, " What time d'you want to start? "

Next morning I made a little bundle of my bathing-costume and tied it on to the handlebars of my motor bicycle, then went to fetch Tilde at her home. Yet I was conscious of a certain kind of

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ALBERTO MORAVIA wrote his first novel when he was eighteen. Banned by the Fascists and driven into hiding during the German Occupation, his brilliant Woman of Rome sold nearly a million copies in this country alone, and Two Women starring Sophia Loren made a film to remember. Russia, the Far East, India, America—he has travelled them all and home is now Rome and the island of Capri.

remorse—after all, Ginetta had made that vow out of love for me; besides, between Ginetta and Tilde there was the same difference as exists, let us say, between a doll that opens its eyes and says, " Papa " and " Mamma " and a living person.

When I gave our agreed signal of a whistle, Tilde appeared at the window of her home in Vicolo del Cinque; she was bare-armed, her hair was arranged so that big yellow ringlets fell on her shoulders, and her bosom was well displayed in her low-necked blouse; and she cried out gaily to me, " Now we must wait for Ginetta."

I was completely taken aback. " Ginetta? "

" Yes, of course. She came round to the bar yesterday evening and said we were to wait for her and we'd all three go to the sea together."

Before I had time to recover from my surprise there indeed was Ginetta, a venomous smile on her lips, all dressed up, in spite of the heat, in grey wool up to her neck.

" Well," she said, " shall we go? "

" Haven't you brought your bathing-costume? Surely you could undress, at least? "

" I vowed not only that I wouldn't bathe but that I wouldn't even put on my costume."

" While you were about it, you might as well have put on your fur coat."

" There's nothing wrong with this dress."

Well, in the end we all three got on to the motor bicycle, Ginetta behind me and Tilde behind Ginetta. We started off, going by the Passeggiata Archeologica and into Via Cristoforo Colombo. Ginetta had put her chin on my shoulder, and was pouring the poison of her discontent into my ear. " I did wrong to come," she said, " I'm dying of heat."

" And why *did* you come? "

" You wanted it so much, I did it for your sake."

" What I want is that you shouldn't spoil my outing. But what I should like to know is, why you made this vow. "

" And what *I* should like to know is, why *you* got ill."

And so on. All of a sudden I couldn't bear that little whispering

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voice any longer, and at a certain point I stopped abruptly and said, " Now let's change round. Let Tilde come behind me and you go behind Tilde."

" But why? "

" Because you talk to me and I get distracted and we might finish up in a ditch."

So we changed round and I had peace. Tilde, for her part, did not talk because, as usual, she had nothing to say. Then, suddenly, at the Naples crossroads, someone gave me a violent pinch in the arm, so that we very nearly did finish up in the ditch. I stopped and asked Tilde angrily, " What on earth is the matter with you? "

She laughed and said, " Ginetta told me to pinch you, so I did."

" Are you crazy? " I asked Ginetta. " What's the matter? "

" I just felt like it," she said. " I'm sick of you. And d'you know why I'm sick of you? I made that vow for your sake. And in return you wouldn't even make the sacrifice of giving up this trip to the seaside."

" But I've been thinking about the sea for months. It's your own fault—you should never have made that vow."

At last we saw the sea. The road was like a strip of bright light going down into the far distance, cutting through the countryside and the pinewoods, losing itself in the even brighter light of the sea, ablaze with sunshine.

As we went down the hill I started singing from sheer joy; Tilde joined in and Ginetta was silent. We went along the main street of Castelfusano, and then, passing the bathing-huts, came to the beach and the sea. Here I stopped and left the machine, and then ran down through the bushes, holding the laughing Tilde with one hand and, with the other, Ginetta, who sulkily let herself be dragged along.

The beach was almost deserted, with only a few groups of bathers here and there; there was an old jetty with rotten planks which stuck out some way into the calm sea. Drunk with delight, I went behind one of the bushes and was undressed in a moment.

" Hi, Tilde, are you undressing? " I shouted.

And, from behind another bush, she answered, " I'm already in my bathing costume."

I had undressed in such a mad hurry that I failed to notice I had no costume. Ginetta had taken it at the moment when we left the motor bicycle. " Ginetta," I called out, " give me my costume! "

" I'm here," she replied promptly, " on your left; come and get it."

I stole out cautiously but could see nothing. At the same time I

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heard, from my right, Ginetta's voice calling out in a spiteful tone, " Yah! I've caught you now! "

I turned and saw that my clothes, which I had left on the ground, had vanished.

Disconcerted, I called out, " Ginetta, give me back my clothes, and my costume too! "

The same spiteful voice answered, from some hidden spot, " I'm not giving you back anything. It's not fair for me to be roasting in the sun while you wallow in the sea and enjoy yourself."

" But what fault of mine is it that you made that vow? "

" Of course it was your fault—you shouldn't have got ill."

In the meantime Tilde, stupid as usual, was shouting, " Come along, Attilio, let's go and have a bathe! "

" I can't," I replied, " I've nothing on."

A long argument followed. I was shouting to Ginetta to give me my costume; she kept on refusing; and Tilde kept repeating that she wanted to go and bathe. Finally I lost patience and said to Tilde, " Now look, surely you can manage it; go and get my costume from Ginetta."

With joy in her voice, she answered, " D'you give me leave to do that? "

" Certainly I do."

If you could have seen Tilde! She took a great leap and made as if to seize hold of Ginetta. But Ginetta was quick to avoid her, and ran off with my clothes under her arm. From the bush in which I was standing immersed up to my chest, I watched Tilde, in her bathing-costume, and Ginetta, fully dressed, the one chasing the other in a long race, first across the beach and then along the edge of the sea. Tilde was laughing good-humouredly, but Ginetta appeared to be quite serious.

They went on running like this for some time, and then Tilde caught up with Ginetta and seized hold of the clothes, which fell on the ground. Ginetta turned round; Tilde, who was laughing all the time, stooped down to pick up the clothes. Then I heard a shrill scream and saw that Ginetta had seized Tilde by her long curls and was dragging her along the sand; and then suddenly, she threw her back against one of the sand-dunes, leapt upon her like a wild beast, and slapped her face again and again, right and left—I was able to follow the movement of her arm and hand rising and falling upon Tilde's pretty cheeks.

To tell the truth, I was astonished at her violence; it was violence of a spiteful, bloodthirsty kind. Tilde had risen to her feet again and was walking away along the edge of the sea, her arm across her face, her shoulders shaken by sobs.

" Tilde! " I shouted. She certainly heard me, but she shrugged

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her shoulders and walked on. As for Ginetta, she had vanished, together with my clothes and my bathing-costume, behind the dunes.

I was now alone. The bush concealed me, it is true, up to the chest, but I couldn't stay there for ever; on the other hand, the idea of issuing forth, naked as I was, was not to be thought of—at any rate until the few bathers who were to be seen here and there on the beach had gone away. Furiously angry, I stayed there for I don't know how long, standing upright and still in the scorching sun and looking into the thicket which surrounded me and which appeared to be deserted as far as the eye could reach.

All of a sudden Ginetta's voice, quite close to me, made me jump. "How are you getting on?" it said.

"Very badly," I replied angrily, "come on, give me that costume."

There was silence.

Then the voice went on, "If I give it to you, what will you give me in exchange?"

I could not make out where she was hiding, among all those round bushes that were so exactly alike. But from the soft, playful tone of her voice I seemed able to see her, and to see that she was calm again after the slaps she had given Tilde—in which she had vented her ill-humour—and was now smiling, affectionate, gentle. However I said harshly, "I won't give you anything. And in fact, if you don't give me that costume, it will be my turn to make a vow."

"What vow will you make?"

"I shall swear that everything's finished between us. That'll be my vow."

I heard her laughing. "Well, why don't you swear it, then?"

I felt troubled, because I realised that I was incapable of making this vow—I loved her too much.

After a little, her voice went on again, "Well then, in exchange for the costume, what will you give me?"

I moved in order to see where she was and the bush pricked my bare skin in front and behind. "A kiss," I said, with a sigh.

"Here's your costume."

The costume flew through the air and landed at my feet. I slipped it on, and then I asked, "Where are you?"

"Go and have your bathe. You can give me the kiss afterwards."

So I went and had a bathe. The water, so deliciously warm in the month of May, rose very slowly right up to my neck as I walked along the sandy sea-bottom. Finally I came out again and

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walked back up the beach into the thicket, circling round among the bushes. All of a sudden something fell violently on top of me. It was Ginetta, in her petticoat, and she had thrown her arms round my neck and was laughing.

I gave her the kiss I had promised, and then she said, " It's an ill wind that blows no one any good. Now we can be together for a little, by ourselves, without Tilde."

" But what if Tilde doesn't come back? "

" Oh, she'll come back. She's left her clothes here. Besides, she'll want something to eat."

And so it was.

After about an hour, Tilde called to us from the beach, in a frightened, despairing voice. Ginetta ran to meet her and embraced her. Then she called me, " Come on, go and have another bathe with Tilde. I'll wait for you here and get the lunch ready."

I walked down beside Tilde, who appeared humiliated. " Well," I said to her, " Ginetta gave you some good hard slaps! "

" D'you know, I swore I'd never speak to her again? "

" And so . . . ?

" And so . . . instead of that, I came back here. Ginetta knows how to keep a vow. I don't."

Translated by Angus Davidson

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SUMMER FARM

Straws like tame lightnings lie about the grass
And hang zigzag on hedges. Green as glass
The water in the horse-trough shines.
Nine ducks go wobbling by in two straight lines.

A hen stares at nothing with one eye,
Then picks it up. Out of an empty sky
A swallow falls and, flickering through
The barn, dives up again into the dizzy blue.

I lie, thinking, in the cool, soft grass,
Afraid of where a thought might take me—as
This grasshopper with plated face
Unfolds his legs and finds himself in space.

Self under self, a pile of selves I stand
Threaded on time, and with metaphysic hand
Lift the farm like a lid and see
Farm within farm and in the centre, me.

NORMAN MACCAIG

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LONE DHOW

By ADRIAN CONAN DOYLE

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IT WAS nearing midnight when the vessel *Jean Laborde* edged her way into the quay. A wind, gritty with dust from the foothills of Abyssinia fifty miles away, skirled through the deserted streets of Djibouti to churn the water into eddies of dirty white foam against the pylons.

It was unpleasantly cold for a night in French Somaliland, I thought, as I pulled up the collar of my old shooting-jacket. Was the wind usual for this time of the year? If so, I was in for trouble, for it is virtually impossible to fight a big shark in a rough sea from the deck of an Arab dhow. Up to now, all had gone well. My shark lines, specially made by British Ropes Ltd., had been tested successfully up to three thousand pounds dead weight and nothing short of an icthyosaurus was likely to bend my eighteen-inch steel hooks.

I had come to Somaliland for a specific purpose. The Natural History Museum of Geneva was anxious to obtain an adult tiger shark and, as my interest in shark fishing was known to the Museum Director, Monsieur Dottrens, he had asked me to undertake the quest.

I had no illusions. It was going to be difficult for three principal reasons.

First, the tiger shark, though found in all tropical seas, is harder to obtain than the majority of sharks, owing to its great strength and ferocity coupled with the fact that, unless one goes as far afield as the Bay of Bengal, it is less common than, say, the hammerhead or grey nurse.

Secondly, the coast of Somaliland, the nearest locality to offer any chance of getting a tiger shark, is notorious for its barrenness, its lack of fresh water, and generally grim conditions.

Finally, if my luck was in and I got the shark, what then? It would not be a sardine which I could pop into a bottle of formaldehyde. How the devil was I to preserve and safely convey a fish, presumably weighing a thousand pounds or more, from some godforsaken spot on the Somaliland coast to Geneva, four thousand miles away? There was talk of a special plane but, knowing that museums invariably lack money, I felt that this was a problem that I would have to solve for myself if and when I had taken the maneater.

I use the term maneater deliberately, because over recent years there has been a tendency—in the circumstances, a very dangerous tendency—to write and broadcast the most fallacious nonsense about sharks . . .

The lion, even the Bengal tiger, is a kitten when compared with the great white shark or the grey nurse creeping on its belly over the sand as it stalks some unwary paddler in shallow

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water. It is by no means a rare occurrence for a tiger or a mako shark, when infuriated or ravenous, to attack a boat as big as a dhow. The mako attacks head-on and, owing to its light build, is dangerous only to the man who is in line with its leap. But the tiger attacks with its tail, using it as a battering flail, often with devastating effect, against the side of the vessel. As recorded in the account of my Mafia expedition, I nearly lost my Arab nahoda through just such an attack by a tiger shark, and the native fishermen at Obock told me that on several occasions their dhows had been assailed by tigers.

In Djibouti, my man, Hussein, set off to find his cousin and another Somali Arab as fresh hands while I hastened to the Hôtel de France to get myself cleaned up in clothes and body. The few European residents of the old hotel, mostly French air crews and American businessmen on the way out from Addis Ababa, stared in consternation as a kind of tramp, in tattered khaki and gunbelt, strolled through the entrance!

Showered and scrubbed and in decent clothes again, I found myself at the Vice-Consul's hospitable dinner-table that night with a group of French officers.

Later that evening, as we prepared to take our leave: "I hear you've been camped in Gubbat Kharab," remarked the officer who had been my vis-à-vis at dinner. "Three of us, with a couple of Somalis, were there last Sunday in a motor launch and met two very big sharks in the bouche."

"Forgive me, but are you quite sure that they were not blackfish, the small whales?"

"No, no. We ran alongside them, where they were idling on the surface, and I can tell you we sheered off pretty quickly, for each was as long as the launch. They were sharks all right, for I saw the underslung mouth when one of them turned in the water. Tiger sharks, I should say."

If he was right, then this was the first occasion since the start of my expedition that a tiger had been even reported.

It was after midnight when I reached the old Customs House where my ship was moored.

"Hussein!"

A shrouded form rose from the deck.

"I am here."

"Get the water cans filled as soon as it's daylight. We're going back to Gubbat."

"Sahib!"

"I know. It's tough on you with that rotten engine to look

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after but we've got to go." I put my hand on his shoulder. "Here's the reason," I said, and recounted what I had heard from the French officer. "We'll sweep the channel area and then get back here if we draw blank."

"Imshallah!" said that most excellent chap.

So the next day saw us hovering round the entrance into Gubbat Kharab, this time on a sea as smooth as glass. But there was no sign of the sharks.

The sun was already westering when we looked our last on that most inhospitable region.

"We can't reach Djibouti tonight," I remarked to Hussein, "so we'd better anchor in Ras Ali."

Here, in another of our old stamping grounds, we passed the night with one shark line out. But nothing came to disturb the desolate stillness of land and sea save for schools of garfish skipping across the surface on the tips of their tails.

Returning to Djibouti for twenty-four hours before setting out for Ras Bir, I had a chat with Mr. Corassandjian, an adventurous Greek who, over many years, had fished the coasts of Somaliland.

"At Ras Bir," he warned me, "you must use an empty two hundred litre petrol drum on your line if you are after tiger shark."

"I don't like the idea at all," I said. "I've fished for sharks all over the world and I have never yet used a drum as a float. The tiger must be given a sporting chance."

"Believe me, he has it, drum or no drum," he replied earnestly. "These Somaliland tigers, though not common, are of exceptional strength and ferocity, and I warn you right now that if you have not a drum on the line he will drag you down to Berbera or up into the Red Sea—probably wreck you completely on a coral reef. Even with the drum to help you, he'll give you a devil of a fight or break the line."

This was the voice of local experience, and I was not such a fool as to ignore it. Incidentally, the Vice-Consul had informed me that they were betting in the town that I would not get a tiger because of the abnormal continuation of the high winds.

So out we set for Obock, on the way to Ras Bir, only to spend hours adrift with a broken-down engine and, by the time we had gained our destination for the night, we were all exhausted with the continuous pitching and rolling under that pitiless sky.

Next day, having bought two goat's legs, we set forth before sundown for Ras Bir.

I had hoped to find the spot to which the old Danakil had led us on an earlier occasion but, though I had marked it on my chart, this time we hunted around in vain until darkness fell.

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It was a small coral plateau covered by only four metres of water which fell away on all sides into depths of over a hundred metres. Here we could have got down an anchor, leaving the ship to drift over the encircling deep.

Having failed to find it, however, that night there was no alternative but to drift anchor-free on the open sea.

A sandstorm, obscuring the moon in a reddish haze, set us rolling so violently that we could not have fought a shark if we had hooked one.

In the darkness before dawn, we were roused by loud grunts coming out of the sea as though we were surrounded by a herd of pigs and, as the first light came over the horizon, a marvellous spectacle met our eyes. It must have been some kind of migration, for the ship was hemmed in by literally hundreds of the great Indian Ocean dolphins, running up to ten feet or so in length, and for more than another hour they rolled by, grunting and snorting, sometimes leaping high in the air to hit the water again with a splash like a bursting shell. Nearer to Ras Bir, a big swordfish was beating the surface to panic the fish schools.

On our way back to Obock for our day's sleep, we had heavy sport with the trolling lines, hauling in barracuda, red snapper, and sapphire-tailed kingfish, until the lines were finally snapped by fish too big to hold. I could not help bewailing the fact that the Geneva Museum had not equipped me with chemical preservatives which would have enabled me to bring them back some of these splendid specimens.

The following evening I found the plateau and for four days and nights we remained at sea, having many little adventures and seeing spectacles of marine life which repaid any discomfort we suffered in a tiny ship rolling so fiercely before the waves of the Indian Ocean that it was difficult even to keep on one's feet.

But not once was the surface broken by the sinister dorsal fin of a tiger shark.

My hopes sank to zero.

It was the fifth day when we put into Obock for water that, after much bartering with a screaming old hag naked to the waist, I acquired the whole carcass of a freshly killed goat, blood, guts, and limbs.

And then it was that, at long last, I picked up a piece of news.

The day before, an officer diving for shells had seen a tiger shark! As the creature swam towards him, the man had scrambled into his boat and paddled shorewards.

Here, then, was the second sighting of a tiger to be reported to me but this time closer, so much closer that it was in our very vicinity.

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Night had fallen when we got back to our station off Ras Bir. The wind had quieted down and, as we put out a single shark line attached to the drum float and baited with both legs and the haunches of the goat, the dark depth below us was lit far down by those shimmering flashes of phosphorescence like the play of submerged lightning.

I checked again that each man was wearing a knife, the one essential measure of security.

"Shall I put the blood over the side?" muttered Hussein.

"No, wait. Let the smell of the flesh spread a bit, and later on we'll tip over the blood."

By the time we had cooked and eaten a barracuda, the moon was sending its pale tremulous light across the surface of the sea.

"You and the others get some rest," I said to Hussein. "I'll keep the watch."

Soon the only sound was the deep breathing of the men curled up on the planks, dead to the world.

Then I tipped the blood and guts over the ship's side.

The hours crept past and at last, turning on my torch, I glanced at my figureless watch. It was one a.m.

Before calling Hussein to take my place while I rested, I went to the stern to have a last look at the drum.

Tiptoeing along the gunwale to avoid waking the crew, I nearly fell over Tamer's dark form crouched tensely against the stern rail. "Hullo!" I said.

The man sprang round. "The drum!" he hissed. "Sahib, the drum is moving!"

Craning over the railings, I stared at the black blob floating fifty yards away on the moonlit water. And then my heart seemed to miss a beat.

It was moving. Yes, by God, it *was* moving!

Slowly, in a direct line, it swung across the surface from left to right and back again.

My yell awoke the ship.

From the bows stretched our anchor rope taut down to the coral plateau, from the stern stretched the shark rope equally taut to something far down in the depth of the sea.

If the anchor pulled . . .!

Hour after hour had gone by, with an occasional shudder from the ship and the never-ceasing movements of that black blob from left to right and back again like the pendulum of a clock. Then the line had gone quite still and taut with, now and then, a little quiver running through it.

Not an inch could we gain.

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At last the east grew light and, even as the rim of the sun broke the horizon, the drum began suddenly to move straight towards us.

" Haul, boys! " I shouted, and like madmen we fell upon the rope. In it came, coil after coil, against the tremendous weight at the other end.

We panted and heaved while the sweat glistened on our bodies. What were we hooked into, down there in the deep? A shark, a manta ray, a sawfish?

Now the rope was coming in quicker and, rushing to the side, I peered down into that translucent blue depth.

An enormous shape was rising slowly into view ten yards below the surface. The great square head, the ponderous body dark above, white below . . . there was no mistaking it!

" Tiger shark! "

It should have been a yell of triumph, but the word seemed to choke in my throat.

With a rush, the great fish broke surface.

" Keep clear of the rope! "

Now was the danger moment. Heaving together, the five of us fought it alongside.

The grinning jaws yawned open. The fierce black eyes, covered periodically by their nictitating membranes rising and falling like white discs, glared up at us.

" Fire! " shouted Hussein.

I shot twice. A fountain of blood and water burst over us while the ship rocked to the smashing blows of the creature's tail.

I fired again and again.

The tiger's vitality was appalling. With six bullets in its head and the whole crew hanging on to the rope, it was still full of fight, still pounding its tremendous bulk against the ship's side, its jaw clashing at everything within reach.

Tamer, seizing my arm, pointed into the depth. " Look! " he cried.

As I hurriedly reloaded my gun, I caught a glimpse of a second tiger shark some yards down creeping stealthily through the bloodstained water.

We had not a moment to spare if we were not to lose our battle after all, for this other tiger, driven berserk by the stench of gore, would very likely attack the one which we had hooked.

In the meantime, the latter had submerged.

" Keep the line taut," I panted, " or he'll roll and bust it."

Spray lashed over us as our united strength brought the fish to the surface again and, leaning over, I sent a seventh bullet crashing through its head and an eighth through its guts—heavy calibre bullets, let it be understood, and well placed at that.

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But still the rows of teeth, curved like a tiger's claws, gaped up at us.

The sea was red with blood when finally the great fish turned sideways, the ship quivered again to a smashing blow, that terrible mouth opened and closed and—the task was done.

The Geneva Museum of Natural History would have its tiger shark.

As we were in no shape then to fight a second one, I kept firing single shots into the water as the crew worked frantically to get ropes round the inert mass alongside, for there was not the slightest chance of hauling it aboard.

Then, in triumph, we towed it to Obock where the five of us got into the water and, with the help of three dhowmen pulling on the ropes from above, attempted to raise the shark on to the deck.

Not a chance!

The Commanding Officer, who had come hurrying down to the quay on hearing the news, emptied the native gaol of its inhabitants to assist in the operation. It took seventeen men to haul the tiger from the surface up to the deck four feet or so above.

Though nearly four metres in length, the bulk of the creature was colossal and it weighed just over fifteen hundred pounds. It was a female and we had rid the sea of a very real menace, for the female shark, like her human counterpart, is far more courageous and deadly than the male.

What a magnificent fight she had put up for six hours against a drum, a ship, and five strong men, and even then it had needed eight bullets to subdue her. There were seven neat holes through her head and one had penetrated the heart.

If I had fondly imagined that my troubles were now over, I had a very rude awakening.

Having staggered back to Djibouti through the worst seas we had experienced during the whole expedition—a journey made all the more memorable by having over half a ton of tiger shark on board—cables were dispatched to Geneva, imploring instructions and instant action. A taxidermist must be flown out at once.

In the meantime, the tiger was housed at the refrigeration plant, the price of her cell being £3 per day without bath or breakfast.

Three days went by while I stumped around nervously, making myself a perfect nuisance to the Vice-Consul and the local telegraph office.

Then came word from Geneva. Congratulations, and would I photograph and measure every part and bring back the head.

No, I would not. Had we endured all this merely to bring

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back a pair of shark's jaws? If that was the case, I would prefer to keep the trophy in my own collection. As usual, a woman in the shape of this female shark had saved me and now I was being let down by the miserable men.

Frenzied cables spewed out to my Geneva lawyer, one who does not let vegetation grow under his feet. His reply reassured me a little, for it made it clear that the museum had not realised that the tiger was in a refrigeration plant.

Would I do the necessary, have a crate made and bring the shark back with me on the *Jean Laborde*?

I would, come hell and highwater.

At this point, a new factor appeared. The manager of the refrigeration plant telephoned the Vice-Consul to inform him that the tiger was stinking the place out, and if this continued I would be liable for all damage inflicted on perishable goods housed throughout the building.

Armed with the kukri and a couple of big hunting-knives, Hussein and I got into the cell; and there, working in a temperature below freezing-point, Hussein nearly naked and myself clad in a tropical shirt and shorts, we cut open the stomach, removing all the offending guts and offal. The liver alone required our united strength to lift it.

After this operation the smell subsided, and now the problem was whether the deep-freeze on the *Jean Laborde*, en route from Madagascar, could take the shark complete with packing-case. The ship replied by cable that she could.

Now, for the packing-case. Made from the cheapest wood, the local price was £25! Done!

The Vice-Consul being engaged, I spent my last night in Djibouti drinking orangeade in a native dive called the Red Arrow, where more than one Somali drunk hiccupped beautiful words in my ears on the subject of my beloved lady from Ras Bir.

It is the little incidents in life that bring things home to one and I realised just how fortunate I had been when an elderly Issa, who had, it appeared, walked all the way out to the refrigeration plant for a peep at its inmate, told me that he had never before seen a tiger shark in Djibouti where he had spent his whole life.

Next day, the packing-case containing both the tiger and an outsize barracuda was lifted by the dock crane on to the *Jean Laborde*, while my gallant lads stowed my baggage in my cabin.

"You'll come back?" asked Hussein.

"Not here, mon ami. Perhaps to the Arabian Coast."

"If you send for me, I'll come to meet you in Aden."

Then we shook hands and I parted from a damned good man.

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The voyage was uneventful but, twenty-four hours out from Marseilles, I was informed that the French railways were to go on strike the day we were due to arrive!

"But we won't let you down," said Commandant Menes. "The shark shall stay aboard in the deep-freeze until somebody finds a way to take her to Switzerland."

Fortunately, representatives from the museum and the *Tribune de Genève* were there to meet the ship at Marseilles and, the strike being over within ten days, a refrigerator-car was hitched on to the Geneva express.

Twelve hours later, a lorry laden with a crate bearing the slogan, REQUIN TIGRE POUR LE MUSEE DE GENEVE in large letters on its sides, was honking it way through the traffic en route to the Museum of Natural History.

And so tonight, with my manuscript finished, I shall treat myself to a wine of the premier cru. Nothing less will do in which to drink to the memory of the lady of Ras Bir.

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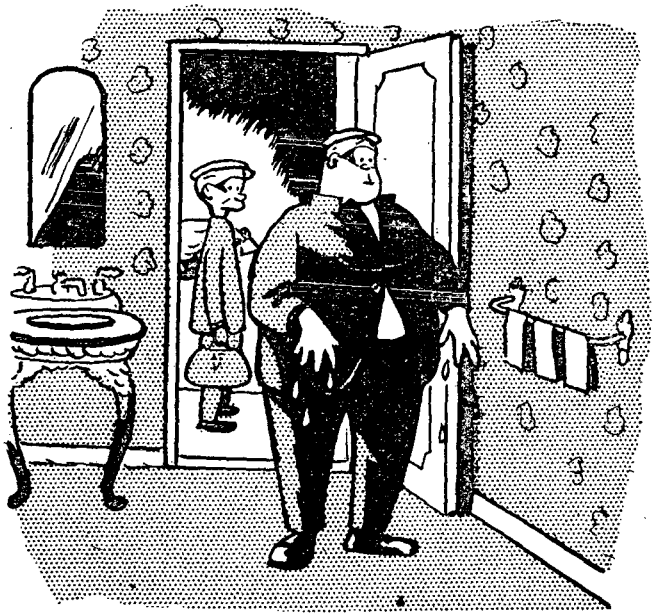
Butch the Burglar



"I know you're not a guest, but you're not one of the family, either. Go ahead and use them."

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Footle Flusher

BY BRIAN CLEEVE

THE Honourable Philip Heytesbury Mortimer was extremely British. He was also extremely handsome, a combination not quite so unusual as you might think. And in Italy, where tall, fair men start with an advantage anyway, he had something of the effect on women that a kipper has on cats on a sunny day. He had the littlest, softest, woofliest moustache, strong white teeth like almonds bursting out of their skins, and when he went, "Haw, haw," as he did when he saw a joke, Italian women of all classes and most ages tended to whisper "mamma mia" and clasp their little soft predatory paws together in a positive ecstasy of admiration. So big, so beautiful, so divinely stupid.

But fortunately for the shreds of morality that I am trying to keep attached at least to the beginning of this story, Philip was almost totally unaware of the effect he produced. He was not only Britishly handsome. He was Britishly shy. When women looked at him, he tended to splutter and cough and turn a shade of red; the exact shade depending on the woman. And this so embarrassed him that he never noticed *how* the woman was looking at him. The mere fact that she was looking at him at all was enough, if not too much. And unfortunately his profession—one could not call it less than a profession, indeed I personally would call it much more—compounded this embarrassment. He was not ashamed of it. In fact, in a shy British way he was profoundly proud of it. But the fact remains that it was not a profession he could discuss easily with persons of the gentler sex.

In fact, I find even myself a shade embarrassed when it comes to telling you about it. But why? After all, what could be more worthwhile, more fundamental—if you'll pardon the expression—than selling water closets? Sound, solid, classical closets from the home of the closet—Footle-on-Trent in Yorkshire. In the nineteenth century they used to say "Footle Flushes the World," and it was very nearly true. Today, alas, the Footle export trade has shrunk from a nobly roaring flood to a miserable trickle but, nevertheless, all over the civilised world, and even in places

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of doubtful claim to that distinction, like Italy, you will find Footle Flushers still gurgling.

And one part of Philip's job, perhaps the most important, was to see that throughout Italy no Footle Flusher, whether in antique hotel or still more ancient palace, broke down for lack of expert advice. If a Venetian plumber, used only to modern shoddy or ancient simplicity, was baffled by the splendid complexity of a Footle cistern, he would call on Philip; if the major-domo of a Roman Duke thought the velvet padding of the ducal

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closet needed renewal, he would call on Philip. And indeed, if someone wanted a *new* Footle Flusher, they would also call on Philip. But this, I am afraid, happened rather seldom.

Meanwhile, with tireless optimism, Philip called on prospects: on plumbers, on architects, on builders of motels and hotels, on restorers of convents and monasteries, of cathedrals and palaces. Let a length of scaffolding and a few sewage pipes be lying outside a building, and Philip would be there. As happened on a sunny Roman day, in one of those suburbs of Rome so exclusive that the tourists' guides have never heard of it.

Philip was driving his Topolino up a hill, when outside the tradesmen's portcullis of a magnificently decaying palace, he saw a plumber's van. To stop his car, adjust his black Homburg hat, to make sure that a Footle Representative's card was in his waistcoat pocket, were the tasks of a moment. To walk round to the front entrance—for a Footle Representative is *never* a tradesman—was the work of only a longer moment. He readjusted his hat, his tie—the Footle tie, a sober black with gold chains embroidered on it—his woofly moustache, and rang the bell by pulling the rusted, ancient iron chain that hung by the iron-studded doors.

And after no great interval the doors were opened, or rather one leaf of them. But not by the expected footman in purple livery and powdered hair, or even by the major-domo. It was opened by a servant girl, something unheard of in any self-respecting palace. Before Philip had time to decide that here was a palace come too far down in the world to Footle with, he realised that the girl was looking at him. He had an impression of velvet: black velvet eyes, red velvet mouth, and a velvet skin whose colour hovered between brown and rose and white in the most disturbing fashion, and disappeared into her black servant's uniform like a velvet otter sliding into half-concealing water.

"Mamma mia," whispered the girl, whose name was Lisa, and she held out her little paws towards the card that by some reflex action Philip was offering her. For a moment their hands touched, and electric shocks ran up and down Philip's arm, prickling the hairs on it. A positive flood of scarlet rose up from his tight white collar to engulf his head, and he turned away and said, "Haw haw haw," three times rapidly, to clear his mind.

"Fo—O—ta—lay," the girl was spelling out. "*Cosa v'ole il Signore Fo—O—to—lay*?"

And there the matter might have bogged down if at that same moment the lady of the palace had not descended the stairs. Descended? Can a whole dictionary supply a sufficient description of the way in which the Princess Alida Grazia di Troppo

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Altero came down a staircase? Rippling like a lazy puma, each foot gliding softly, slowly, to the next tread, each softly curving thigh outlining itself for a sumptuous moment against the white silk of her houserobe, her hand like a white orchid trailing down the marble balustrade, she flowed down the stairs as if voluptuously melting under the torrid weight of her hair; hair of honey-gold, massed like a bee swarm on her white silk shoulders.

"Ga ga ga," Philip found himself saying, and put out a hand to support himself against the wall. Instead of the wall, he found it resting on a delightful softness of the maid's, and he was so stunned, so throttled by emotion, that he left it there. And so for that matter did the maid.

"Who is this?" said the vision, in a voice like half-sheathed claws on skin.

"A Signore Fo—O—ti—lay," said Lisa.

"Ga ga ga," said Philip.

The vision took the card, read it with drooping alabaster eyelids, raised one lid at Philip to reveal an eye of wicked green, and breathed, "Bella fortuna. Come wit' me."

Philip buckled gently at the knees and swayed forward. His face was so red by now that steam came off the surface in little shimmering layers. His heart was having palpitations, and he dropped his hat. Lisa picked it up and kept it.

"Come," breathed the Princess, and drifted back towards the stairs.

Oh, I say, thought Philip. Oh, I jolly well say. He lurched after the Princess like a man following a light in a fog, swallowing at one-second intervals. Up the stairs, to where enormous, dilapidated drawing-rooms stretched rose-and-gold to infinity. Up another staircase, to where through massive doorways one could see fourposter beds on daises hung with blue velvet, faded Spanish leather, and curtains of midnight embroidered with gold stars.

The Princess melted through one of the doorways, lazily beckoning, and Philip put up his two hands to his throat in the belief that his collar was strangling him. "Oh, jolly me," he was trying to whisper, but nothing came. The bed swam in front of him, eight posts like the hitching-posts of Venetian gondolas, banded in red and gold; a mound, a mountain of down billowing up between the curtains of dove blue crêpe-de-chine and oyster satin.

"Come," whispered the Princess and drifted, melted, undulated on past the bed, past a seven-foot couch and a three-foot armchair, to a door painted in cream and gold, which she opened as if the effort of turning the solid gold handle was almost beyond

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her strength. " Here," she whispered, her lips melting, dripping perfumed honey from her little sharp teeth. " In here, Signore Fo—O—te—lay."

Philip staggered forward. A dazzlement of crystal blinded him: mirrors, bottles, jars, trays of crystal, gold, silver scattered on an enormous dressing-table in front of a crystal mirror covering nine feet of wall in each direction. Beyond it, a bath of black marble veined with rose quartz. Two polar bearskins faced each other beside the bath, and beyond them, through a curtained archway, enthroned, magnificent, unbelievable, he saw it. *The Lost Eliogabalus:* the unique, the supreme, the ultimate of Water Closets, the crowning glory of nineteenth-century British plumbing.

Made originally as a gift for an English Cardinal in Rome on the orders of the then Chairman of Footle Ltd., an old gentleman of High Church convictions and Oecumenical leanings, it had taken ten workmen (do I say workmen? *artists*, masters of the art of plumbing) it had taken ten of them a year to make. When sat on, it played religious music. Vivaldi, Palestrina, Bach. When flushed it played the Hallelujah Chorus.

But this was only the beginning. A library accompanied it—was built into it rather—housed in mahogany shelves. Sermons, the history of the Tractarian Controversy, the Lives of the Popes, and other works of similarly reflective appeal. Close the mahogany doors and turn taps, not of vulgar gold but of solid Brummagem brass, each one weighing three pounds nett without washers, and the Eliogabalus became a Turkish Bath. The music might now be the Eroica, or even, on weekdays, Mozart.

Turn a brass wheel a little smaller than that of a medium-sized steamship, and the Eliogabalus would vibrate, at carefully calibrated speeds, fast or slow as the health and inclination of the user dictated, conveying Vibrant Shocks and Healthful Locomotion to the Muscles. Turn another wheel, and the unique commode would become a reclining couch. Revolving and pulsating buffers upholstered in chamois skin would gently massage and pummel the reclining body of the user, pulleys would work away at unwanted avoirdupois, and vibrations of the couch would Tone Up the Skin and Restore the Vital Forces of the Lymph and Circulation.

Unfortunately, a little before the presentation could be made, the happy recipient-to-be passed away.

The Eliogabalus in its massive crate got mislaid for nearly twenty years in the cellars of the Vatican, and was eventually given by a Cardinal Secretary of State to a Princely Minister of

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the Italian Government, for political favours to be received. Perhaps not unnaturally the Cardinal forgot to mention this to Messrs. Footle, and in any case the High Church Chairman had long since died and been succeeded by a Nonconformist Chairman, who as a junior director had disapproved of the whole papist scheme and as Chairman preferred to forget it.

But among the employees of Messrs. Footle Ltd., the Eliogabalus remained a legend, an El Dorado of plumbing which they would never find again, but whose legendary existence lightened their hours of labour and brightened their dreams. And here, oh here it was. Philip sank slowly to his knees.

"*The Eliogabalus*," he breathed.

"It no longer work," breathed the Princess and, moving past Philip's kneeling figure with a soft warmth of silk rustling against skin, she put her hand on the massive flushing handle of the machine. "Loook," she murmured, and pressed downwards. Nothing happened. "We have five plumberrr. They cannot find the matter."

"I will dedicate my life to fixing it," breathed Philip. In front of this œcumenical gift it seemed somehow wrong to raise one's voice.

"I hope you can fix it quickerrr than that," the Princess sighed, and whispered past him again.

She picked up a crystal bottle and idly sprayed herself with essence of orchids. Some of the spray fell like rain on Philip, and his senses swam.

"When can you start?"

"Ga ga ga," said Philip, feeling his heart wander round and round inside his throat as if it was looking for the exit.

"Goood," breathed the Princess. "You will stay 'ere, of course. In the ex-major-domo's suite of rooms. Take as much time as you weesh." And she laid so languorous a glance on Philip that his eyelashes twitched.

She leaned towards him, her breath lightly disturbing the extremely scanty covering of her magnificent bosom. "'Ave anyone ever tell you you 'ave the mos' extra-ordinary 'andsome moostache?" she whispered. "For a plumber," she breathed in afterthought, and vanished back into her bedroom, leaving behind a waft of essence of orchid.

"By golly," whispered Philip to the nearer of the polar bearskin rugs, and he could almost have sworn that the polar bear winked at him in reply . . .

By that night Philip was installed in a pleasant flat on the topmost floor of the palace, the Special Footle Representative's superb set of plumbers' tools laid out neatly on the windowseat,

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the Footle Representative's Handbook propped open on the dressing-table at the chapter headed, How to Deal With The Housewife, and a glass of champagne at his elbow.

The champagne had been brought to him by Lisa with the Princess' compliments. " Che uomo," Lisa whispered, disturbingly close to the back of his neck.

" Cheers," said Philip, sampling the champagne.

" What you read? " murmured Lisa, her soft fingers lightly removing an invisible hair from Philip's dressing-gown shoulder. " 'Ow to Deal Wit' De 'Owsewiffa? Is about Love? "

" No," said Philip. The little soft arms slid suddenly round his neck. " Ga! " he cried, and little sharp teeth almost met in his earlobe.

" My mistress think you are reMARKably 'andsome—for a plumber," a voice caressed him, and then arms and voice and warmth were gone, the door closed gently, and Philip was alone with the Footle Handbook and the champagne. Even the champagne seemed to have gone surprisingly flat.

The following day, Philip began to work and, faced with the challenge of the Eliogabalus, the problems posed by the Princess and her maid seemed to fade a little. After all, a youth of cold showers and unheated bedrooms produces a moral foundation, a moral fibre that should withstand greater challenges than that.

With spanners and callipers, brass polish and oil and emery paper, screwdriver and handbook, Philip set himself to restore the Eliogabalus to perfection. At intervals, Lisa would bring him coffee and rolls, open sandwiches of Parma ham, slices of melon sprinkled with caviare, glasses of champagne containing a black olive to emphasise the dryness, and little tulip-shaped glasses of a cognac laid down by the present Prince's great-grandfather.

Needless to say, the Prince himself was quite ignorant of these light attentions.

He was, in fact, mean as a pig, according to Lisa's drifting fragments of gossip, as she came and went with the glasses and the dishes and the cups of coffee. Only last month the major-domo had been fired as a final economy.

" Jus' imageene, no manservant in this 'uge palazzo. No man at all excepting the Prince 'imself like an old floppy stick of stale celery, not a man at all really. Even when 'e was a boy an' there was twenty maidservants in the attics, not one of them ever 'ad to scream for 'elp. Can you imageene? " And she let her fingers drift lightly over Philip's blond, and by now tousled, hair.

" Don't do that," Philip said, almost swallowing a brass screw. " I'm trying to recalibrate the timing device of the pianola."

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"You are such wunderful plumberrr," sighed Lisa. "You make the couching in that thing to work, no?"

"Not yet," said Philip.

"Such pity," breathed Lisa, and went reluctantly away.

At other intervals the Princess herself came in, padding softly on bare ivory feet across the marble floor, the bearskin rugs, to stand beside Philip's kneeling, dishevelled figure.

"You are such wonderful plumberr," she would purr, and rest her soft, predatory hand on his shoulder.

"By jiminy!" Philip would breathe, and remember his Public School. But by the third day the memory was growing dim, and a diet of champagne, Beluga caviare, Parma ham, and eighty-year-old cognac was beginning to do its insidious worst. At about six o'clock of the third evening, as Philip was at last synchronising the Hallelujah Chorus with the flushing chain, the climax came. The soft, Princessly hand rested with that fraction more of emphasis, the voice caressed with that shade more of melting warmth, the last glass of cognac had seemed to have that minim more of languorous and debilitating power, and the tortured Philip tottered round on his knees and clasped his hands in supplication.

"By jove, you know," he croaked. "I can't stand much more of this."

The Princess leaned down towards him, the raw green silk of her robe falling open with its warm, soft weight. "You are not meant to stand much more, my darlink. The time 'ave come to lie daown." And like a scented puma melting into the jungle grass she coiled bonelessly on to the bearskin rug and held out her arms.

"Gaa gaa gaa!" cried Philip in despair, and pulled the chain of the Eliogabalus, filling the palatial bathroom with splendid music. But it made no difference in the end.

On the fourth day, Philip found it remarkably difficult to concentrate on his plumbing. This was, he thought dizzily, going to be a longer job than even he had thought. "And, by jove," he told himself, "I don't really care." He even hummed to himself as he synchronised the seat and the music of Palestrina, and I'm ashamed to say that, dead to all proper feeling, what he hummed was his Old School Song.

Up St. Foo's, the world is sleeping,
Wake it with a merry cry.
Healthy Minds in Healthy Bodies
Greet the Dawn with gladsome eye.
Rah Rah School, St. Foo's for ever—

he was singing, when Lisa interrupted him.

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" What a beauuutiful singing," she said, " but now you mus' come wit' me because the ex-majo-domo is arrive. He lef' some pieces of baggage in your rooms and he wish to collect."

The ex-major-domo was waiting, with admirable politeness, outside Philip's door when Philip and Lisa arrived. " Many excuses, Signore," the major-domo said. " Jus' a few things I 'ave not place to put when I leave. I am so sorry." And with obsequiously polite washings of hands and bowings of back he allowed himself to be permitted to enter what had, until a month ago, been his own bedroom.

Not a very British looking chap, thought Philip, trying to be tolerant, and failing. Black hair. Black moustache like boot polish on the upper lip. Black eyes like melting buttons. A white plump face with a distinct trace of powder on the cheeks to hide the black beard. Black suit and tie. Damned foreign looking in fact. " Rah Rah School, St. Foo's for ever, May the lesser Races never, Raise their flags above our own." And without much curiosity Philip watched the ex-tenant of the room take a clutter of unimportant objects out of a cupboard that had been locked, and stuff them into a gladstone bag. Last of all a photograph in a silver frame, and if it hadn't been impossible Philip would have sworn that it was a sultry, melting, full-face colour photograph of the Princess.

He was so struck by the impossibility of the impression that he said, " Haw haw," very loudly, twice, and twirled his moustache, that still exuded a trace of essence of orchid when pressed with the fingers. " By jove, no, it couldn't have been," he said. But he went on standing there until, coming to himself, he realised that he was alone, and had been for some minutes. He went downstairs again, trying to sing his School Song with the careless abandon of a quarter of an hour earlier, but he found it almost impossible. The snap, the sparkle was gone from both day and song. Even back in the bathroom, kneeling in front of the closed Eliogabalus, he could not bring himself to work on it, but stayed there reading and re-reading the Handbook, and particularly the chapter on How to Treat the Housewife.

Without exception, the natural modesty of the British Housewife will make her reluctant to discuss the more private aspects of domestic plumbing, and the Representative must therefore exercise great tact in touching upon the Subject. He will do well to develop a vocabulary of Allusive Phrases such as " The Smallest Room." Philip closed the book again with a sigh. Hopeless. Quite hopeless. For one thing the Princess wasn't British.

And at that moment the Princess, with that sumptuous movement of the lower part of the body that Philip had always found

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to be one of the most disturbing aspects of life in Italy, came into the bathroom. She was wearing trousers of white crêpe-de-chine and a green silk hunting-shirt, and carrying in her two hands an obviously heavy sack.

"Filippo," she whispered, letting the sack down to the floor with a little groan of relief, "are we alone?"

Philip looked in the bath and under the dressing-table, and with his heart beginning to pound again croaked, "Yes." Oh golly, oh, by jove.

"Then I can tell you my plan," whispered the Princess, sinking to the floor and drawing Philip down beside her with soft, persuasive hands, each loaded with something close to fifty carats of diamonds and emeralds. "Do you love me?" The warm lips parted, the eyes closed under the alabaster weight of their lids, the lashes lay like golden fringes on the unparalleled cheeks, the bosom in its silken prison lifted gently as the voice sighed.

"Gaaaa," moaned Philip, forgetting the photograph, his Old School Song, the Eliogabalus, the austere beauty of the Footle Plumbing Works, and all else in the world except the enchanting form before him.

"I am so glad," whispered the Princess. "For I am such unhappy wooman 'ere in this disgusting palace, with my disgusting 'usband. 'E is so cruel to me. Loook," and she bared a divine shoulder and the upper half of her magnificent bosom. "Loook where 'e beat me blue an' gold."

It took the eye of faith to perceive any mark at all on that superb skin, but Philip was not in a critical mood. "The swine!" he cried. "The rotter!"

"Oh yes," said the Princess. "One day I theenk he will be killink me with 'is cruelty. Unless—" she opened her staggering eyes like green headlamps so that Philip had to cling on to her to avoid falling over. "Unless I ran away from 'im. But 'oo wit'? A wooman like me? Alone in the wide world?" Her eyes filled with enormous tears, each one perfect, each one falling like a broken crystal heart to her heaving bosom. "Is not possible," she breathed.

"By jove, no," Philip croaked, riven by emotion. "How—how about me, eh? Haw?"

The arms went round his neck, the mouth melted against his, tasting of honey, of wine, of essence of orchids. "I knew, I 'oped, I prayed you would say that. Oh, you are so 'andsome," and she took a more powerful hold of Philip and a second mouthful of moustache. But after a minute or so of this she pushed him back.

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"Later," she murmured. "There will be all the time in the world for loving. Now—we mus' act." She looked at her heavy diamond watch. "Supposink in one half hour you can be at the garden gate of the palace, inside, 'idden among the bushes, waitink for me? Wit' this?"

She touched the sack, and opening its throat she showed him a staggering glimpse of gold. "All the door'andles of the palazzo."

She rose to her feet in a sinuous rustle of silk. "I 'ave to add some more to the collection." She hefted the sack and balanced it on her superb left hip. "Supposink I leave eet for you on the back landink? In one half hour, no? I join you then in the garden, and afterwards—" She gave him the slowest, laziest of smiles, and vanished.

By jove, thought Philip, and went on kneeling on the bearskin, quite stunned, for a full five minutes. And then again, "By jove, I'd better start packing." And gathering his Footle Representative's superb set of plumber's tools, fitting them carefully but hastily into their allotted slots in the Footle bag, he hurried upstairs to pack his pyjamas, his hairbrushes, and his Footle Representative's Handbook. Even hurrying he had barely time. Down the back stairs, carrying plumber's bag and weekend suitcase in one hand, and the by now enormously heavy sack of doorhandles in the other; out of the back door into the scented garden; creeping across the moonlit lawn; finding the garden door and the bushes; all this took him to the fullest limits of his appointed half hour.

And now imagine him creeping forward into the laurels, his heart palpitating with love and fear. He bends his head to avoid a branch, and—THUMP, with the softly efficient noise of a sandbag taking a victim behind the ear, the world for Philip dissolves into catherine wheels of stars and comets with fiery tails. He sank down on to his hands and knees, dropping bag and suitcase and sack from nerveless hands, and slowly measured his full length face downwards on the warm, moist soil.

"Ha," said the ex-major-domo, and stuffing his sandbag back into his pocket he picked up the heavy sack and weighed it reflectively in his two hands. "The treacherous bitch," he said, for I confess he was not a highly educated man. "Ditching me for that!" And he gave the reclining body at his feet a sound kick in the ribs. For I must tell you that on leaving Philip's room with Lisa, the eager girl had taken him down to see the almost restored Eliogabalus. And to see if the machinery worked they had got inside it. And having got inside it, the ruffian had closed the doors and—

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But why sully this unhappy tale further.

Lisa swore ever afterwards that all this happened without the slightest encouragement from her, and I for one implicitly believe her. Indeed she says she was on the point of crying out when she heard first Philip and then her mistress entering the bathroom. And how could she cry out then? I perfectly understand her point of view. And in this way, quite inadvertently, the ex-major-domo overheard the Princess' little plan, and acted as you have seen.

Unfortunately for him, he did not overhear something else. For at the precise moment when he was sandbagging Philip, the Princess was saying to the Prince, in his study, "Giacomo, I swear I've just seen a most sinister looking prowler in the garden, please go down and shoot him dead."

Immediately the Prince, taking a large revolver, went down and began to search the grounds, where the moonlight was by now obscured by a cloud. But even so, within a few minutes the glisten of white teeth and a stern whisper saying, "Alida?" led him to the correct spot, and he fired three rapid shots into the breast of the whisperer, killing him stone dead.

Whereupon, in pursuit of her own devious ends, the Princess came running out into the garden crying, "Police, help, Carabinieri, Bersaglieri, Garibaldi, the Prince has murdered the plumber."

For I must further tell you that all this, except for the unexpected intervention of the ex-major-domo, was all part of the one devilish plan. The sack by now contained not golden door-handles but plumbers' tools and pieces of lead pipe. And but for a happy accident poor Philip would not have been sandbagged but shot, while the Prince would have gone to prison for a very long time, leaving the Princess free to invite the major-domo back to all his former duties and privileges.

But alas for plans. There lay the major-domo, in the full light of the moon that had now returned from behind a cloud, quite, quite dead.

As soon as she saw him the Princess gave a terrible cry and fled back to the palace pursued by the enraged Prince, firing his revolver at her fleeing figure. And out of the house came Lisa, wrapped in a travelling-cloak. She found the major-domo, assured herself that no hospital could help him, and searched for Philip. Within a moment she had found him and was tenderly cradling his head.

"Where am I?" groaned Philip.

"Where you belong," breathed Lisa. "You are not safe to leave by yourself." And in the briefest words she explained to

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him what had been happening for the last several days, and particularly the last several minutes.

"By jove!" breathed Philip. "What a jolly bad show!" And then, moved by curiosity. "Why on earth didn't she tell that—that chap—what she was planning?"

"Women do not always tell men everything. And sometimes that is a bad thing, no?"

"Haw," said Philip reflectively, and found his face pressed against a most delightful softness in which he could detect the excited beating of a heart. "And why didn't you tell me, eh? Haw?"

"Women do not always tell men everything," whispered Lisa again. "And sometimes that is a good thing, yes?" And helping him to his feet, she picked up his suitcase and his bag of plumbers' superb tools. She would also have picked up the sack if Philip hadn't forbidden it. So she sighed and left it, thinking it unnecessary to mention that she carried in the pocket of her underskirt a sizeable number of the Princess' less identifiable pieces of jewellery. And as quickly as the dazed state of Philip's head would allow, she led him out of the garden and out of the Princess' life. And, needless to say, into hers. Because really, as she had said, it wasn't safe to leave him on his own.

The last I heard of them they had a very fine plumbing business in the best part of Naples. But Lisa never allows Philip to call alone on houses any more. As she says, it can be dangerous. So she has learnt the craft herself, and goes along with him. As the plumber's mate.

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SOLUTION to LEISURE PLEASURE in August ARGOSY

1. *Marriage carriage*
2. *Seaview preview*
3. *Nipper kipper*
4. *Brolly lolly*
5. *Cricket wicket*
6. *Yachting jotting*
7. *Pisa visa*
8. *Mussel tussle*
9. *Pebble rebel*
10. *Bingo lingo*
11. *Kisses misses*
12. *Gloaming roaming*
13. *Oxen tocsin*
14. *Butter cutter*
15. *Eider hider*
16. *Lacking quacking*
17. *Patching thatching*
18. *Barley parley*
19. *Backdoor jackdaw*
20. *Puffer's buffers*
21. *Leading reading*

(*Sorry, we couldn't resist it.*)

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A VISIT AT TEA-TIME

by JOHN WAIN

WILLIAMS had to turn back halfway down the drive. His mouth was dry and his heart had begun that old nervous pounding he thought he had outgrown. He went out through the gate again and stood by the hedge, out of sight of the house. If anyone happened to be watching through a window, he did not want to be seen behaving in an eccentric way.

"It's perfectly reasonable," he said out loud, looking half defiantly along the deserted pavement, its gutters full of fallen leaves. Thinking aloud was an old habit of his, but in this case he comforted himself with the thought that it was only natural to try out his voice before ringing the bell. It sounded rather dry and hoarse, but not impossibly so. "It's quite reasonable," he repeated. "Why shouldn't I want to see it? I shan't be putting them to much trouble. And after fifteen years . . . !"

It occurred to him that, even standing in the shelter of the hedge, he was still visible from the attic window. How many autumn afternoons, exactly like this one, had he spent behind that window, intent on some dream-game which had gradually absorbed the entire landscape: the quiet, dignified houses, the trees, the railway bridge in the distance, the occasional passer-by or lonely, sniffing dog.

"Why do you spend so much time in the attic?" he could hear his mother saying. She felt it was ungrateful of him, after they had given up one of the downstairs rooms and fitted it up as his playroom, that he played there so little, preferring the high, secret attic, so much more dream-provoking. The playroom was a challenge to activity, with its electric railway system, its boxes of toys and puzzles, its busy clutter and the determinedly bright pictures on its walls. Only in the attic had he

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felt free to imagine his own world and live in it for hours at a time.

Fifteen years—surely that gave him the right to go up to the front door, ring the bell, and make a simple request? Setting his shoulders back, he turned briskly into the drive and walked, without faltering, the whole way up to the front door. Some sixty yards, he estimated it now with his adult eye. The front garden did not seem to have changed much from what he remembered. It had been mainly grass and shrubs, and it was so still. But the gravel beneath his feet had a sharper crunch. It had either been recently renewed or was very well cared for: perhaps both.

When he pressed the bell he heard nothing. For a moment his nervousness threatened to come flooding back, at the thought that the bell might be out of order, which would present him with the choice of either using the knocker, an assertiveness he shrank from, or standing there until someone discovered him by accident. But he pulled himself together before his control began to slip. It was a big house, and the bell rang in a distant room, probably with at least two shut doors between it and the front entrance.

He had a sudden mental picture of the interior of the house, and in particular of the kitchen: warm and bright, with a fly-paper hanging from the ceiling and Frances setting out the tea things. He would just have come in from school, his satchel and blue mackintosh would be carelessly looped behind the door, and Frances would be getting tea and bread-and-butter just for the two of them, to fill the gap till seven o'clock. Of course it was only in later years that he had been allowed to have dinner with his parents at seven o'clock, after he was ten . . . or would it be eleven?

He heard Frances coming to the door. Her slow footsteps. Of course it could not really be Frances, she was dead and he had been to her funeral. But he could see her so plainly, and it was impossible to imagine the kitchen without Frances, especially on an autumn afternoon with the light beginning to fade and the tea things on the table, as they must surely be . . . Frances! Why did we have to leave this house, why did you have to die, why did it all have to come to an end?

The hallucination vanished in an instant. Even as the door began to open, before he could even glimpse the figure he was about to see, he knew it would not be Frances. All the same, he was nonplussed.

Pale blue eyes that looked curiously flat, as if they were painted

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on a sheet of paper rather than set in a human face. Long, narrow features, iron-grey bun, cool grey nylon overall. Was she the housekeeper? Or . . . ?

" Good afternoon. I wonder if I might speak to . . . " Oh, for the days before he was born, when the door was opened by a servant in a mob-cap—whatever that was—and one simply said, " Is the master in . . . "

The woman stood, waiting, her hand on the doorknob.

" Is the—occupier—er, the master of the house at home? " Williams asked.

" The master of the house? " the woman echoed. Her voice, flat and without modulations, made the phrase sound alien, ridiculous and yet sinister.

Williams forced himself to be bright. " You—it's like this," he said, creasing his face into an ironic, self-deprecating smile, conveying that he knew how absurd he was but nevertheless forgave himself for it out of a large and humane tolerance, a fully civilised man among his peers, " I don't actually know who lives here, but—"

" You don't know who lives here? " the woman echoed again. Once more his own words, held up flatly for his inspection, seemed futile and yet full of menace.

" It's quite simple, actually," he said, beginning again with a good-humoured patience that inwardly surprised him. " This house—"

" We don't want to buy anything," the woman suddenly interposed. With rising panic he saw that she was beginning to close the door against him. *Frances, Frances, where are you?*

" I'm not selling anything." He began to talk quickly. " I simply wanted to ask a very small favour of whoever happens to live here now. You see, I was born in this house."

" D'you want to see Mr. Edmundson? " the housekeeper—for it must be she—chose this moment to ask.

Williams nodded dumbly. He wanted to be done with this woman, whose function in life was so obviously to refuse, to deny, to guard the house against intruders. If she knew the request he had come to make, she would be quite likely to refuse it from sheer force of habit. Whereas the owner of the house, this Edmundson, could never be so insanely grudging as to . . . She was motioning him to enter, to follow her through the hall and into the drawing-room. That was what they had always called this room, rather small and sunless by comparison with the others on the ground floor. It was clear that the Edmundsons used it, just as they had done, as a dumping-ground for unexpected visitors, where they could be out of the way

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until the right member of the family could attend to them.

Nothing has changed, he felt suddenly. The house was lived in, warmed, lighted, its arteries aglow with the essence that made it a living thing, able to welcome him—to extend its own welcome, if need be, over the heads of the present inhabitants.

The room, however, had changed almost out of recognition. The furniture was modern, with that dead, unreverberating modernity that seems to belong to the laboratory and the machine-shop, never to humanity. As if to compensate for the inert silence of the rubber-upholstered armchairs, the blankness of the sensible sofa, the impersonal grin of the electric fire, the wallpaper and curtains carried busy little patterns which did their best to call out in high, childish voices, though anything in the nature of communication remained obstinately out of their reach.

Income? Tastes? Williams pondered. A husband who worked for a news agency? A wife who had been to art school. Something must have caused this bright, dead overlay of up-to-dateness, this combination of bright colours which only succeeded in conveying a hopeless inner drabness. He moved to the window. The electric light in the room made the garden seem dusky, but there was plenty of daylight still, and he ought to be able to—

"Sorry to keep you waiting," said a voice behind him. "You wanted to see me about something?"

Edmundson. Fat, froglike: glasses: prosperous business exterior: accent originally demotic: not altogether sure of himself, but (therefore?) outwardly confident and assertive.

"My name is Williams." He retreated from the frog-eyes into a grave, almost eighteenth-century formality. "I hate to disturb you, but I have a very small request which I hope you will grant."

"Let me know what it is," said Edmundson, matter-of-fact and alert.

"That won't take long. I was born here. We lived here till I was fifteen. Then my father died and we moved to a place in Kent to be near some relatives of my mother's. I've never been back here since—not even to the town, still less to this house. I'm thirty now, so that makes fifteen years."

Edmundson waited. His expression said, Well?

"My father planted a tree in the garden when I was born. He said he wanted the two forms of life to grow up together, though of course it would outlive me. It was a beech."

"Well?" Edmundson said it with his voice this time.

"I just wanted to look at the tree. See how big it had grown."

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" A very natural wish," said Edmundson.

" I could just slip into the garden and look at it, and then make my way round the side of the house. I needn't disturb you again. It's good of you to—"

" It doesn't exist any more," Edmundson interrupted, flatly.

" It doesn't . . . ? "

" I had it cut down. It was in an awkward position. It shaded a large part of the lawn and it didn't really compensate by breaking the wind much."

" You . . . ? "

" The prevailing winds here, as you'll remember, are mostly south-west. The tree hardly gave any shelter. All it did was to block the sunlight from that bit of the lawn. So my wife and I agreed, after trying it for one summer, that we'd be better off without it."

On the words " my wife " Mrs. Edmundson entered, for all the world as if she had listened through the keyhole for her cue. Yet one look at her revealed a person who could never have listened at keyholes. Frank, open, modern, all air and light and sensibleness, with no nonsense and no dark corners beyond the reach of consciousness. Younger than her husband, and conscious of her youth as something to be lived up to: he must be rising fifty, she barely thirty, and she evidently saw it as a duty—the furniture! the curtains!—to represent her generation.

" This is my wife: Mr. Williams." Edmundson introduced them the wrong way round, the woman to the man, though whether this was out of some vestigial gaucherie or from an impulse of genuine courtesy, to set protocol aside and give precedence to the visitor, Williams did not know and would never know. " I'm afraid poor Mr. Williams has had a journey for nothing," he went on, trying to ride over the situation with polite, heavy geniality. " He was born in this house, and the beech tree we cut down—you remember—was planted to commemorate his birth."

Williams shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, irritated by the pompous phrasing. " To commemorate his birth " made him sound like a dead, bald-headed politician. " Hardly that," he said. " To share my life."

" Well, it shared a quarter of a century of your life," Edmundson put in, his matter-of-fact voice reaching towards a cadence of consolation. " It must have been at least twenty-five years old when we—removed it." He didn't like to say we cut it down; oaf as he was, the symbolism was too harsh for him.

It was the wife, brisk, poodle-haired, secure in a bright woollen dress, who now moved in to take charge of the situation. " I

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don't quite understand," though she obviously understood perfectly. "D'you mean Mr. Williams wanted to see how his tree was getting on?" Her phrasing was intended to show, and did show, a Nanny-bright disapproval of childish whims.

"In a way, yes," said Williams, trying to keep his voice level. He hated her, was sure she had been behind the murder of his tree, with her rational machine-turned little mind.

"What a pity," she said, drawing a light breath. "Well, it looks as if that particular quest is over, doesn't it? You'll have to go through the rest of your life without your Doppelgänger."

"You don't have to make fun of me," said Williams calmly.

"I'm not. I'm simply saying that from now on you'll have to adjust to the knowledge that you're on your own."

Suddenly Williams understood. *Psychology.*

"You mean it's infantile regression for me to want to see my tree?"

"Not strictly speaking. Infantile regression comes out in other ways. But it *is* clinging to the past, isn't it?"

"It's only the past because you've cut it down. If it were alive, growing out there, it would be the present."

"Nonsense. If it was the present you were interested in, any tree would do. You've made a symbol out of that particular tree because your father planted it. You should go and get your father to plant another."

"He's dead," said Williams. "He died in this house and after he was dead we couldn't afford to live here any more."

"But there was a piece of your life left growing here and that's what you came back to see."

"Correct."

"But surely you see that you can't live like that? I mean, I'm sorry your tree isn't here, but isn't it a good thing for you, in a way? To know that you've got to carry on with your life independently, not leaning on outside circumstances?"

"I suppose," Williams said carefully, to keep himself from striking her, "by 'outside circumstances' you mean things like the memory of my father?"

"I mean—" she gestured impatiently—"all the clutter and the junk that one's so apt to cling to instead of just living one's life in a straight line."

Edmundson, a busy man, intervened. "Well, I hardly think there's any point in discussing it in those terms. The plain fact is that the garden became ours when we acquired the house, and it was our own decision which trees to leave and which to cut down." This time he had *said* it, perhaps gaining confidence

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from his wife's text-book prattle. " I hardly think we need keep Mr. Williams any longer, unless he would like a cup of tea before going."

Instead of answering, Williams stared at Mrs. Edmundson. Her skin was bad, he noticed—full of open pores and already, at her age, rather loose-fitting. He wondered what enjoyment she got with her husband. Surely her eyes would be brighter, if he was any use to her. And she would live through her body and not through her psychology lecture notes. But then, of course, she would have understood that living things matter, that they are not simply objects that give shelter or don't give shelter.

What was the use? " Thank you for the offer of tea," he said, addressing husband and wife impartially, though he noticed she had said nothing. " But I'd better be getting off to the station. I'm sorry I troubled you for nothing."

Edmundson produced a smile, doubtless largely of relief at bringing the interview to a peaceable end. His wife, her eyelids snapping angrily, was evidently disappointed that Williams had not troubled to quarrel with her.

" I expect you're very cross with us," she said, meaning that she hoped he was, " but perhaps when you think it over afterwards you'll find that we did you a favour."

" A favour? " Williams murmured, perfunctorily ironic, in his eyes she already belonged to the past, that category she herself had declared worthless.

" Liberated you from your father. Try to look at it that way."

He half bowed, gravely indifferent, and murmured soothingly, " I'll see myself out." It would depress him too much to encounter again the nylon-clad housekeeper. After fifteen years, his tone reminded them, he should know his way to the front door.

He reached it unmolested, turned the knob, and went out. By comparison with the deadness inside the house, the garden seemed boisterous with life: a light breeze had sprung up, boughs danced lightly, and shrubs, their shapes magnified in the dusk, seemed like hirsute animals standing still to be stroked and fed.

The front door safely shut behind him, the Edmundsons and their housekeeper already receding into history, Williams stood and looked round. They had spoilt the house for him, they had chased away the ghost of Frances and with it his own small ghost—but the garden, vivid among its stirring shadows, wore a secret, invulnerable air. The soil into which his fingers had plunged so many thousands of times, the grass and stones

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which had been so vividly before his eyes, in the days when he carried his head only three or four feet above them—no Edmundson could take them away; they belonged to him as surely as the cells of his own body.

The path led round the house, to the back garden. Why not—just one look? His feet moved of their own accord, following the right-angled crazy paving towards their own past. The breeze puffed lightly at his bare head. Elation swelled in his veins.

The back garden was larger than he remembered it. Perhaps in those days, when it was his much-trodden kingdom, he had scaled it down to his own size. Now, pleasantly unkempt—evidently the Edmundsons preferred an indoor life—it seemed to his dusk-sharpened eyes to ramble like a prairie.

Where had the tree stood? He owed it, at least, that final salute—to locate the patch of air which, if it were still living, its branches would proudly enclose in a basket of leaf and bark. Besides, he was curious. He wanted to know whether, in her insane spite against his tree—for she must have known, intuitively, that it belonged to his world and rejected hers—the woman had given orders that the very roots be dragged from the earth. Or would he find a tidily sawn-off stump, something to touch with his hand in a final, casual blessing?

Over there, it had been: more or less in that corner of the lawn . . . he began to move towards the spot his eye had selected. And he had taken perhaps three steps before the small, high voice called, "Stop! Or they'll see you!"

Halting, he looked round. "Where are you?" he said into the windy shadows.

"Here. In the tree. D'you want me to come down? D'you need help?"

"Yes," Williams said. "I need help."

There was a rustling scrape of leather on bark, and the boy stood at his side. Seven? Eight? Grave-faced, in forty years he would probably look like his father, but this evening he was still secure within his own appearance.

"They'll see you," the child whispered, "if you don't stand quite still. They have their observation post there—" he pointed— "on top of the shed."

Williams, armoured in grown-up dullness, had assumed at first that "they" referred to the boy's parents. But an observation post on top of the shed?

"Who are they?" he asked, in an urgent, hushed voice.

"The Eskimos," the boy replied, staring straight ahead of him.

"And if I stand quite still?"

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"They won't see you. You'll sort of merge into the tree-trunks."

The lawn was quite bare. Now that Williams' birth-tree had gone, the only tree of any size was some yards away, the one the child had scrambled down.

"Yes," said Williams. "I can imagine that Eskimos would have trouble spotting people among tree trunks. They'd have no practice."

"It's all new to them," the boy explained. "They've never seen trees before. And this is a dense forest. You can't go straight through it. You have to move like this." He began to weave forward, gliding round the rotundity of the trunks.

"What kind of weapons have the Eskimos?" Williams asked.

"Crossbows. They shoot flint-headed arrows. If one were to hit you, you'd be split straight in half."

"Crossbows, eh?" said Williams, peering through the trees. "And what do they use at close quarters?"

"At what?"

"When they fight hand to hand?"

The boy shook his head. "They never do that. They die if they leave the snow and ice. They can't enter the forest. All they can do is to stay in the cold part, with snow and ice. That comes up to the edge of the lawn. The lawn's all dense forest."

Crouching beside the tense little figure, peering towards the Eskimos with their crossbows, Williams felt his frame gripped by a healing shudder of pure gratitude. *The lawn is dense forest*, he sang to himself. *All they can do is to stay in the cold part.*

"Who sent the Eskimos here?" he asked.

"Nobody sent them," said the child indifferently. "They just come because they want to leave the snow and ice. But the forest stops them. All they can do is let off their flint arrows. In the morning, when I first come out, the forest's full of them. They fire them all night. I hear them when I lie in bed. But it doesn't matter. They never hit the birds. And they can't do the trees any harm because the trees have a special hard bark."

"What do you do with the flint arrows? Do you pick them up?"

"I collect them. I'm building a fortress with a flint wall. That was what I was doing in the trees—noting the places where the arrows fell. They're very useful to me."

A thin, houseproud voice called, "David! Tea!"

"That's Mrs. Eggleton. She gives me my breakfast and my tea. I have lunch with Mummy and Daddy, though. I have to go in now. Be careful of the Eskimos if you stay."

"I'll make a noise like a walrus," said Williams. "Then

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perhaps they'll throw some harpoons. You'll be able to pick them up. They're ivory. You can make all sorts of things out of them."

"Don't let them hit you," David warned. "They're very good aimers."

"Ah, but I'm a good dodger. I'll be safely behind a tree-trunk."

"All right. I'll look for the harpoons in the morning. Thanks," he called over his shoulder, running towards the repeated querulous crying of his name.

"The lawn is a dense forest," Williams said to himself. He sniggered, then laughed freely. The Eskimos glared at him from the dark corner behind the shed. "Shoot, shoot!" he called to them. "I'm a walrus!" Uncertain what kind of sound a walrus should make, he trumpeted, then skipped behind an armoured tree-trunk as the harpoons flashed through the air. One, two, three gleaming harpoons of ivory, for David to find in the morning.

Trumpeting, he skipped from tree to tree, hoping to draw their fire, but they had become more wary. Peering cautiously round a trunk near the edge of the lawn, he became aware, suddenly, of a neat platter of wood, shaped off at ground level. His tree. From its thickness he could make a rapid calculation of its height, and the reach of its branches.

"Hullo," he said to it, looking straight into the thickest part of its foliage. "I'm back. I still exist. But it isn't I who matter—it's David. Help him, won't you? Let him win his battle against the Eskimos?"

For a moment he saw himself, chillingly, through the eyes of Mrs. Edmundson. Talking, out loud, to a tree that wasn't even there! At the thought of her taut, disapproving face, Williams burst out laughing. "Eskimos," he said through his puffing explosions of mirth. Stepping warily, circling the tree-trunks, Williams walked back across the lawn. It seemed to him, as he went up the path for the last time and turned to look once more at the garden, that the darkening air was alive with the rustle of branches.

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★ *Writer, poet, lecturer in places as far apart as Moscow, New York, Bombay, and Oslo, John Wain abandoned teaching to concentrate on writing. The result: an impressive assortment of stories, essays, poetry, anthologies, novels, and an autobiography. At home, he divides his time between Staffordshire where he was born, Wales, his wife's country, and London.*

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THE PASSIONATE KISS

What kind of censors have they got over there?

BY FREDRIC BROWN

JUNE 11th. I'm wondering whether what I'm feeling is shock, fear, or wonder, that the rules might be different, the other side of the glass. Morality, I'd always thought, was a constant. And it *must* be—two sets of rules wouldn't be fair. Their censor simply slipped up; that's all it could have been.

Not that it matters, but it happened during a western. I was Whitey Grant, Marshal of West Pecos, a fine rider, a fine fighter, an all-round hero. A gang of badmen came to town looking for me, real gun-slingers, and since everyone else in town was afraid to go up against them, I had to take them on all by myself. Black Burke, the leader of the outlaws, told me afterwards—I'd only had to knock him out, not kill him—through the bars of the gaol, that he thought it was a bit like *High Noon*, and maybe it was, but what does that matter? *High Noon* was only a movie and if life happens to imitate fiction, so what?

But it was before that, while we were still on the air, that I happened to look out through the glass (we sometimes call it the screen) into the *other* world.. One can do this only when one happens to be facing the screen directly. In the relatively rare times when this happens, we get glimpses into this other world, a world in which people also exist, people like us, except that instead of doing things or having adventures, they are simply sitting and watching *us* through the screen. And for some reason that is a mystery to me—one of many mysteries—never do we on two different evenings happen to see the same person or group of persons watching us from this other world.

That's what I was doing when I looked through last night.

In the living-room into which I happened to be looking, a young couple sat. They were close together on a sofa, very close together, only a dozen feet away from me, and they were kissing. Well, we allow kisses occasionally *here*, but only brief and chaste ones. And this kiss didn't look to be either. They were simply twined in each other's arms, lost in and holding what

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looked like a passionate kiss, a kiss with sexual implications. Three times in pacing towards and from the screen I saw them, and they were *still* holding that kiss.

By the time I caught my third glimpse of them they were still holding it and twenty seconds at least must have elapsed. I was forced to avert my eyes; it was simply too much. Kissing at least twenty seconds! Probably longer, if they started before my first look or continued after my last one. A one-minute kiss! What kind of censors have they got over there, to be so careless?

What kind of board of governors to *let* censors be so careless?

After the western was over and the glass opaque again, leaving us alone in our own world, I wanted to talk it over with Black Burke and did talk quite a while through the bars, but I decided, no, I shouldn't bring up what I had seen. They'll probably hang Burke soon, after his trial tomorrow. He's being brave about it, but why should I put another worry on his mind? Killer or no, he isn't really bad, and hanging is enough for him to have to think about!

JUNE 15th.

I am deeply disturbed now. It happened again last night. And it was worse! This time most definitely a shock. The few nights between that first time and this even worse one, I'd been afraid almost to look out. I'd turned towards the glass as seldom and as briefly as possible. But when I had seen through it there'd been nothing amiss. A different living-room each time, but never one with a young couple alone together in it, violating the Code. People sitting around behaving themselves, watching us. Kids, sometimes. The usual.

But last night!

Really shocking. A young couple alone again—not, of course, the same couple or the same living-room. There wasn't any sofa in this one, just two big over-stuffed chairs—and they were both sitting in the same chair; she was on his lap.

That was all I saw at my first glimpse. I was a doctor and conditions at the hospital were pretty hectic and kept me rushing from emergency to emergency, saving lives. But near THE END—that's what we call it when the final commercial comes on and we can no longer see out nor can those in the outside world any longer see us—I was delivering some good advice to a younger doctor and faced away from him to do it, which put me looking into the screen, or through the glass, and I saw them again.

And either they had moved or else I saw something I had *not* noticed in my first glimpse. Oh, they were watching the screen all right and not kissing. But!

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The girl was wearing shorts, very short shorts, and his hand was on her thigh—and not even just resting there, but moving slightly, caressing. What sort of a den of iniquity is it out there that such a thing would be permitted? A man caressing a woman's bare thigh! Anyone in *our* world would shiver at the very thought of it.

I am shivering now, just thinking about it.

What's wrong with their censors anyway?

Is there some difference between worlds that I do not understand? The unknown is always frightening. I am frightened. And shocked.

JUNE 22nd.

A full week has passed since the second of the two disturbing episodes, and until last night I had begun to feel reassured. I had begun to think that the two Code violations I had observed were isolated instances, things that had slipped through by mistake.

But last night I saw—or rather heard, in this case—something that was a most flagrant violation of a completely different section of the Code.

Perhaps before describing it I should explain the phenomenon of " hearing." Very seldom do we hear sounds from the other side of the screen. They are too faint to penetrate the glass, or they are drowned out by our own conversations or the sounds we make, or by the music that plays during otherwise silent sequences. I used to wonder about the source of that music since, except in sequences that take place in night clubs, dance halls or the like, there are never any musicians around to produce it, but finally I decided that it is simply a mystery that we are not supposed to understand. For one of us actually to hear identifiable sounds from the other world requires a combination of circumstances.

It can happen only during a sequence in which there is absolute silence, sans even music, in our own world. And even then it can be heard by only one of us at a time, since one of us must be very, very near the glass. (We call this a " tight close-up.") Occasionally, in these ideal circumstances, one of us can hear, clearly enough to understand, a phrase or even an entire sentence spoken in the world outside.

For a moment last night these ideal circumstances prevailed for me and I heard a complete sentence spoken, as well as being able to see the speaker and the spoken-to. They were an ordinary-looking middle-aged couple sitting, but decorously apart, on a sofa facing me. The man said—and I am sure I heard him correctly, for he spoke quite loudly, as though the woman was a

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bit hard of hearing: "G—— that's awful. Let's shut the d—— thing off and go down to the corner for a drink."

The first of the two words for which I use dashes was the name of the Deity and is a perfectly proper word when used reverently and in context. But it certainly didn't sound as though he was using it reverently, and the second word was very definitely profanity.

I am deeply disturbed.

JUNE 30th.

There is no real reason for me to make an entry tonight to add to the other notes I have made recently. I am more or less doodling and will no doubt throw this page away when I have finished with it. I am writing it simply because I have to be writing something, and might as well do this as something even more meaningless.

You see, I am writing this "on the screen," as we call it. Tonight I am a newspaper reporter sitting in front of my typewriter in the city office of a newspaper.

I have, however, already played my active part in this adventure, and am now in the background, required only to look busy and keep typing. Since I am a touch typist and do not need to watch the keys, tonight I have ample opportunity to take occasional glances through the glass into the other world.

I find myself again seeing a young couple alone together. Their set is in their bedroom and obviously they are married, since they are watching from their beds. Beds, plural, of course. I am pleased to see that they are following the Code, which permits married couples to be shown talking to each other from twin beds a reasonable distance apart, but more than understandably forbids their being shown together in a double bed.

Just took another glance. Apparently they aren't much interested in watching the screen from their side. Instead, they are talking.

Of course, I cannot hear what they are saying to each other; even if there were absolute silence on our side, I am too far back from the glass. But he is asking her a question and she is nodding, smilingly.

Suddenly she sweeps back the sheets, swings her feet out of bed, and sits up on her side of it.

She is naked.

It is *impossible*. In our world there *is* no such thing as a naked woman. It just cannot be.

She stands up and I cannot tear my eyes away from the impossibly beautiful, beautifully impossible, sight of her. Out of the corner of one eye I can see that he has thrown back the

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clothes on his bed and he, too, is naked. He is beckoning to her and, for a brief moment, she stands there laughing, looking at him and letting him look at her.

Something strange, something I have never felt before, something I did not know was possible, is happening to me. I try to tear my eyes away, but I cannot.

She crosses the two steps between the beds and lies down beside him. Suddenly he is kissing and caressing her. And now—

Can such things be?

It is true, then! *There is no censorship for them;* they can and do do the things that in our world may be only vaguely suggested as off-stage happenings. How can they be free when we are not? It is cruel. We are being denied equality and our birthright.

Let me out of here! Let me out!

Help, anyone, HELP!

LET ME OUT!

LET ME OUT OF THIS BOX!

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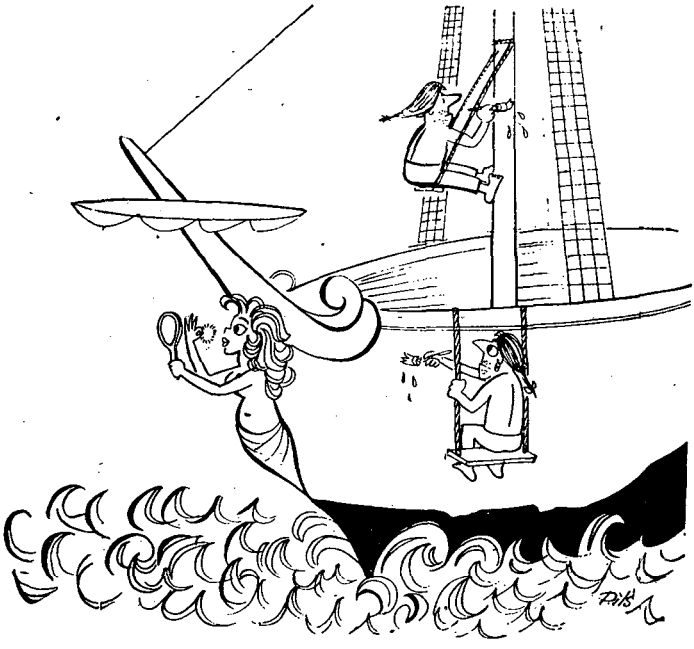

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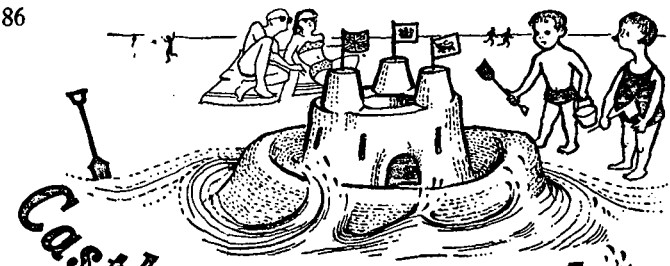

Castles in the sand

When I was down beside the sea
A wooden spade they gave to me
To dig the sandy shore.
My holes were empty like a cup,
In every hole the sea came up,
Till it could come no more.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

The building was almost encircled. The next wave ran round the splendid façade so that a little of the wall crumbled off and was engulfed in the creaming foam. Six lesser waves did no more than confirm the position, but the seventh, hurling itself upon the beach, tore hissing round the walls of sand and met in seething triumph behind the gigantic castle. Isled at last in the swirling waters, the fortress was beleaguered.

Every child and every mobile daddy flung his last ounce of energy into the defence. For this moment they had laboured half the morning, and the fall would be spectacular. Last boulders were carried, dripping, to the bulwarks; last pails of sand were emptied over ramparts. As Benjy added his pailful, Mandrake picked him up and heaved him over the wall on to the still dry floor of sand inside the castle. Howling defiance to the embattled tide, the rest of the small fry leapt or scrambled over the walls to take their stand beside him, while uncles and fathers, conscious of work well done, waded back to the beach and began to roll down the damp legs of their trousers.

JOHN AND EMERY BONETT, *No Grave for a Lady*

. . . But stay—
Three light-limbed boys make merry in the foam
Threshing the glinted spray
And, there, a child at play
Called to go home

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Leaves sadly his bright castle built with care
Against this forager.

Thought made it stand
So firm, so brave
Deep-moated in sand
Against the advancing wave;
Square is the outer wall,
Buttressed and turreted,
Tall
The tower lifts its head—
A jewel blest—
A seagull's feather for its rampant crest . . .

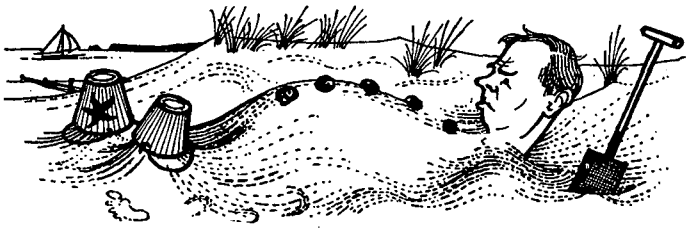
CLAUDE COLLEER ABBOTT, *The Sand Castle*

Burying Father

It was hot. They filed slowly off the train and one by one jumped down into the burning sand. How strange it was to walk in! They laughed and shrieked, feeling themselves helpless, ran and jumped, straddled up the steep root-laced sides of dunes and slid down again in slow, warm avalanches of lazy sand . . . Then at last they came out on the enormous white dazzling beach with its millions of shells, its black-and-white-striped light-house, and the long, long sea, indolently blue, spreading out slow, soft lines of foam and making an interminable rushing murmur like trees in a wind . . .

The chief event of the afternoon was the burial of his father, who had on his bathing suit. He and Mary and John all excitedly laboured at this. When they had got one leg covered, the other would suddenly burst hairily out, or an arm would shatter its mould, and his father would laugh uproariously. Finally they had him wholly buried, all except his head, in a beautiful smooth mound. On top of this they put the two pails, a lot of pink shells in a row, like the buttons of a coat, and a collection of seaweeds. Mother, lying under her parasol, laughed lazily, deliciously. For the first time during the day she seemed to be really happy.

CONRAD AIKEN, *Strange Moonlight*



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In the Swim

Neptune loves the breast-stroke
As Margaret loves the sea,
And now it is his best joke
To keep her from her tea;

While mother bakes in dudgeon
Beneath the hot sea-wall
And sees her do the trudgen,
And sees her do the crawl. .

WILLIAM PLOMER, *The Naiad of Ostend*

Throw Down the Sponge

We were allowed to run across the links, up the long, steep flight of steps between houses, into the heart of the little town, to buy sponge-cakes at the confectioner's shop, which we took back to the beach, so as to keep the wolf from the door till lunch-time. Sometimes you dropped your sponge-cake and afterwards found yourself munching a strange mixture of sponge-cake and sand. This must have happened often, since I sometime catch myself, on the rare occasions when I eat a sponge-cake nowadays, faintly surprised to find no sand in it. Sand pervaded those summer holidays. There was sand in our shoes, in our clothes, in our hair; the rasp of sand between our fingers and our toes; the gritting of sand between our shoes and the oilcloth and carpets; and in our beds.

Sand was the very symbol of the happy, sunny, out-of-doors life we were leading.

MARTIN ARMSTRONG, *Victorian Peepshow*

. . . salty water

Louder than the gulls the little children scream
Whom fathers haul into the jovial foam;
But others fearlessly rush in, breast high,
Laughing the salty water from their mouths—
Heroes of the nursery.

The horny boatman, who has seen whales
And flying fishes, who has sailed as far
As Demarara and the Ivory Coast,
Will warn them, when they crowd to hear his tales,
That every ocean smells alike of tar.

ROBERT GRAVES, *The Beach*

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GIRL FROM CHANNEL STREET

Mad, infuriated, as I was, I couldn't bring myself to turn Vicki in

BY FRANK FARNHAM

WE WERE all by ourselves that day, as we swam, as we fished, ate our picnic lunch, as we climbed through the woods, as we kissed or held hands, as we tried on our new status for size.

" Ellen and I," I howled once, and *Ellen and I*, the echo rolled back from the mountain.

" Oh, you fool," Ellen said. " They can hear you for miles."

" Who? " I asked. " The ducks, maybe, or a strolling bear, or a worm, or a snake in the grass. And who cares? It's proper. We're married."

Just barely. It was the first day of our entire lives we had completely belonged to each other, spoken of no other, thought of no other. At two o'clock that afternoon, we celebrated our twenty-four-hour wedding anniversary.

But the day ended. The immortal sun sank. The immortal stars shone. I found Altair and Antares in the sky, and Ellen found Deneb and Vega, and we were as special as they were. We knew we would never grow old, or less loving, and never, never die.

Then Ellen said, " Let's."

" Let's what? " I said.

" It's getting late," she said.

So we went to bed. We had set it up on the porch of our honeymoon cottage in the back of beyond, in the wilderness of northern Maine, for the screens kept out the insects, and the weather was fine.

We listened to the bellowing of the bullfrogs up and down the stream, and watched a firefly a while flashing green upon the screen, beyond the mounds our toes made.

" Kiss me," Ellen said, and I did. She had a sweet breath, like wild roses.

" Kiss me again," she said, and I did that too. I kissed her

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closed left eye, and her closed right eye, and the tip of her nose, and her mouth. When I kissed her eyes, I thought of butterflies' wings; and when I kissed her nose, I thought of a vanilla ice-cream cone, and when I kissed her mouth—

"I love you so many ways," I said.

And she opened her big, dark eyes. "But do you love me enough, Joe?"

"Honey, darling, enough for what, for goodness' sake?"

"Enough to tell me about—" she sighed before she plunged—"her?"

"Her?"

"Your other girl."

"Oh." I hadn't known until then that she knew there ever had been another girl, but I couldn't deny it. She had already, with that one request, unleashed the cloth horse and the doll's head, and the phantoms of Fist and Pimple.

"How did you know?" My knuckles felt bruised, as they had that other night.

"Don't be naïve, Joe. How could I not know, and love you? I even know when it began. Your last leave, when you were so distant and strange."

It was ended then, too, except at times in my mind. My last leave was five years ago.

"But why ask me now if you didn't then?"

"Because," she said, with incisive logic, "now you're mine."

And I couldn't quarrel with that, and had no wish to. "Then here goes," I said.

Five years ago, I was not a college graduate, not married, not even engaged. I was in the Army, stationed at Camp Orange on the west coast, which was about as far away from home as I could get and still remain within the continental limits of the country. I had leave shortly coming up, and then I was due to round off my three-year stint of military service with a final year of foreign duty.

I was twenty years old then, and I shall never be that young again, or that vulnerable. In the midst of my Army friends, but far from home—and due to go even farther, all the way to Japan—I was occasionally lonely.

I remember I tried to phone home that payday—it was Mother's birthday too—but no one was there to take the call, and I found out later that Dad had taken her out to celebrate. And then I didn't have any other ideas, and went back to the barracks, and lay on my bunk a while.

Across the way, there was a payday crap game going on in the

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dayroom . . . Out in the latrine, the big rush of town-goers had slicked up and left, but there was water still sizzling in the shower-room, and that would be Madman Pultowski most likely, scrubbing away at the last vestiges of his natural body oils. You could hear him in there at eight, or at midnight, or at three in the morning.

Lulled by the water, I dozed off towards sleep . . . I was sitting in a car with a girl, we were looking at the moon over the water, and just as I bent to kiss her, somebody started shaking me, and a voice said, " Unhand that pillow," and when I woke up enough to look up, it was Tex Clay, spread-leggéd, hands on hips, laughing down at me.

" Now what did you have to go and do that for, Tex? " I said, unhanding the pillow, which didn't look much like a girl at all now that I was awake.

" I just went broke in the dayroom, so I said I'll go back to the barracks and go into town with good old Joe."

" On whose money? " said good old Joe.

" On yours," said Tex.

" And what's in town? " I inquired.

" Girls," he said. " Dance at the Trianon. Music. Perfume. Laughter. Life. It adds up to more than a pillow."

It did sound pretty good as he said it, and when I looked at the watch on my wrist, I saw it hadn't got late. Those were the only reasons I had when I went.

I met Vicki there at the dance. There were lots of girls there, white-smiling between the dark flames they had put on their mouths—cat-sleek girls, run-to-fat girls, easy-met girls—but from the moment I spotted her, Vicki drew my eyes like the brightest star in the firmament. Among all the pretty girls there, and there were quite a few, she was the only orchid. Her tight black dress shone silkily when she moved through the roving blue spot in the arms of her partner. Her hair was dark and shining, too, with flickering blue stars. She had a luminous, big-eyed face.

I nudged Tex.

" You know her? "

I knew he might. He went all the time to the Trianon.

" Vicki? "

I thought about her name. It fitted.

" Nice name."

" But no one for you to play with."

" Why not? "

" Big brother is said to be big poison, one of the top local toughs."

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" He's her brother? " He was dark and thick-lipped and lean, in a ducktailed haircut and pants as tight as a sailor's, but except that they both had dark hair, I couldn't see any resemblance.

" They say so, but he acts a lot more like the boyfriend. Better pick another number. How about that unattached small blonde in the corner? "

" You pick her," I said. " I'll watch a while."

Tex ambled off after the small blonde, and I stayed where I was, thinking about Vicki and watching her when I could. I was planning what I would say and what she would say if my chance came, and what I would do if the brother interfered.

He never did though—not at the Trianon. The band kept right on playing, and the dancers—most of them—kept dancing, and I never did know for sure what brought the four policemen there, but when the heads began to turn, I looked round myself, and saw them standing in the main entrance, and when I looked back, Vicki was not dancing any more. She was sitting alone near one of the side exits, and the brother had disappeared.

I wasted no time then, but circled the floor to her, afraid that someone might beat me there, but nobody did, and nobody tried to. It could have been that nobody dared.

She was frowning down at the floor when I got there, and when my feet stopped before her, she didn't even look up.

" Thanks very much. I'm not dancing," she said.

My tongue was all thumbs from the surprise. It took me a couple of seconds to get anything out. " I haven't asked you yet."

" You were going to."

It was only then that she lifted her eyes slowly up to my face; and when she did, I took hope, for I could see a glisten of tears, but no anger there. She was younger than I had thought, no more than eighteen, and even more beautiful, now I was close.

" It's all right. I don't dance very well anyway," I said, " not anywhere near as well as your brother, but I sit fine. Is the chair beside you taken? "

I thought perhaps she would laugh, or at least smile a little at that, but instead of an answer, she had a question of her own to put.

" Who told you he was my brother? "

" A friend who's seen you here before."

" Well, tell your friend he has bad information. Nick's not my brother. He's my stepfather's son. So far, he only *acts* like he owns me."

" You sound bitter."

" I got a right." She stared through me without seeing me for

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a bit, and to help her remember that I was there, I said, " About the chair? "

" Look, soldier, if you want the chair, you can have the chair. Or if you want to dance, we'll dance. Only you'd better know how it is first. Nick don't like me to dance with anyone but him, and if he comes back and finds us dancing, you won't want to leave the Trianon without a buddy or two to make up for Nick's knife."

Anyone with any sense, I suppose, would have left it at that, and retreated strategically, but I was not wholly sensible then. Her husky voice was an excitement, and her skin was pale and pure. There was a lot about Vicki I wanted to know that I'd never find out if I left her.

" I've got a buddy if I need him," I said. " Are you afraid to dance with me? "

" I've gone against Nick before," she said. " I got a right to belong to myself."

" Then I'm not afraid to dance with you either."

But we both lied a little, and we each knew the other had as she stood up and lifted her arms to me, and that was part of the delight. When I touched her, my heart raced, my mouth went dry. When we began to move together to the beat of the music, she was as fluid in my arms as a floating leaf on a lake. It is difficult to describe feelings one has for which there are no words in the language, and the closest I can come to it is to say that to dance with her was to die a little. It seemed that far out of this world and beyond my experience.

I did not tell that to Vicki, of course. (I did not even tell that to Ellen.)

" I never danced this well before in my life," I told Vicki in the pause between numbers.

" Really? "

" And I had nothing to do with it," I went on, made bold by her obvious pleasure. " It was you."

" And partly Nick."

" I wasn't trying to dance better than Nick, if you mean that. But if you mean making every second count while he's gone, then maybe it was partly Nick. When do you think he'll be back? "

" When the cops leave, I guess. He doesn't like cops much, especially since he's out on parole. Why; you worried? "

" No. I'm just in no hurry to give you up. In my mind," I confessed, laughing, " I've been taking you away from Nick since I got here tonight."

" I noticed. I was sure it would be you before I looked up

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and saw it was you. I mean, when you asked me to dance."

The music had started, and we began dancing again.

"By the way," Vicki said, against my ear, "I'm Vicki; perhaps your friend told you. You got a name?"

"Joe Merrill."

"Joe Merrill from where?"

"Wilson Falls, Maine."

"Never heard of it."

I wasn't astonished at that. Few people had.

"It's near Augusta, the capital," I said.

"I never heard of that either. I ain't so sure about Maine."

"You're kidding," I said. But she wasn't. She had left school in the ninth grade, she said, because her stepfather didn't see any point, and because her marks hadn't been up to much, and she hadn't cared about school anyway.

I said what I felt. "That's too bad," I said.

"Why?"

"I guess I just like books. Because you can find anything you want in them."

"Except life," Vicki said. "What are you, a college boy?"

"I plan to be," I said defensively, "when I get out."

"Imagine," Vicki said. "You're the first guy I ever danced with who planned to go to college."

Enveloped in this new stature, I could afford to belittle myself.

"I haven't got there yet. Don't count on it."

"But you will all right. You don't have Channel Street to hold you back, Joe. What are you going to be?"

"I'd like to teach," I said, recovering from the shock of Channel Street, for it was not just the poor part of town. It was the heart of Skid Row. And then, to give her status, to accord her the right to an equal aspiration, I asked the same question of her. "Vicki, what would you like to be?"

"Free," she said soberly. "Away off in the country, somewhere it's clean, trees and fields and such like, and a man of my own, so long as he isn't Nick."

And I looked at her, feeling the physical attraction between us I knew she was feeling too, and for a moment I wondered if it could be more, and how it would be if I were the man.

It wasn't likely, I knew, or even reasonable, but I was full of idealism then, when I was twenty.

Not Vicki. "Of course," she went on, "I don't expect ever to be what I want to be. Nick keeps pushing, and his old man keeps pushing, for me to marry Nick, you know, and if it hadn't been for Ma, I'd be married now. But not many get free from Channel Street, and they'll wear me down in the end."

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And I couldn't let it happen. She was too fine, too honest. "But there *must* be some way—" I began, but she faltered, she almost missed a step. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, forget it." She seemed twice as old as she had ever been, and she had found something else to be afraid of. "There's no reason for you to care about me, you don't know what I am, so let's not dance any more, or talk any more. Good-bye, Joe. I'm just not right for you."

She was trying to push me away, but instead, I swung her round. "Now wait, Vicki, please—" I looked to see what had frightened her.

Two more of the ducktail set were standing over against the wall. I hadn't seen them before. One was a beanpole with a pockmarked face. The other was built like a bull, and had a tiny mouth no wider than his bashed-in nose. They matched me, stare for stare.

"You've got to let me go," Vicki whispered.

"Who are your friends?"

"Fist and Pimple. No friends of mine. They run with Nick. They'll tell Nick. And the cops are gone. Now will you let me go?"

I whirled her away down the floor. "You know I won't. Now listen. Have you got to wait for Nick? Couldn't you leave now, and tell him you thought he wasn't coming back?"

"Maybe I could, but what would be the point?"

"Just that I got you into the jam. The least I can do is see you safely home."

"But they'd only follow us. Fist and Pimple would."

"Not if we do it right. You brush me off at the end of the number, and you leave, and they'll see me still here. They'll see me pick out another girl, and begin to dance. So then they'll lose interest in me, won't they?"

"I guess so."

"And after they've lost interest, I leave. I duck out the side exit, the way Nick left. And I'll meet you—where could I meet you?"

"There's a bar on the avenue—it's a couple of blocks over, and one block down. I could go there, I guess."

"Just believe it will work," I said, "and it will. You'll see."

"I only see what I know, Joe, and what I know—" She shrugged. Her smile was strange. I wondered what was really in her mind.

But we did it my way. As soon as the number was over, she walked off and left me, and went across to talk to Fist and Pimple, by then supporting one of the Trianon's famed pink

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columns. My peripheral vision is good, and I saw her make a derogatory face in my direction. I saw them laugh. I saw her leave, but by then I had found Tex Clay with the same small blonde as before. I told Tex I wanted to borrow his girl for three minutes.

"Well," Tex said. "Natalie, this is Joe. Joe, meet Natalie."

We said hi to each other. She had bad teeth when she smiled. She said she would love to be borrowed by me, if Tex didn't mind. Tex said if he had the loan of a couple of bucks, for cabfare to take Natalie home, he didn't think he would mind.

"I'm going to take a girl home myself," I said, handing over the money.

"Luck," Tex said. For a while, I thought I had it. At least, I got out of there, and I didn't see anyone follow. But at the bar, Vicki wasn't outside, and when I walked in, she didn't seem to be there either.

And then, just as I was thinking Nick had found her and taken her away, and it was over, and hurting from the disappointment, the door of the telephone box folded open, and Vicki was there, too beautiful to bear.

"Vicki," I said, "I thought for a minute I'd lost you."

"Not quite yet." But she had been crying, I thought. I wanted to kiss her and hold her, but the bar was too public.

"I phoned Ma," Vicki said. But there was nothing in that to cause her tears for she added that her mother was home alone, that the coast was clear, and I seized her hand and led her outside, my last doubt gone, as happy as any king.

And she wanted to walk, when I offered to take a cab. That was fine with me. I asked which way, and she pointed south across the neon-lit avenue, still a-glisten from the afternoon rain, to the streets where the lights were scattered, and we could be alone. It was a roundabout way to Skid Row.

We met a few people, not many, and we passed no one at all. Our hollow-sounding sidewalk cadences were slow and measured. She got me talking about my home.

"You got a girl back home, Joe?" she finally asked.

"Well, in a way I have. We're not engaged, nothing like that. We just grew up together."

"You got a picture?"

"In my billfold."

"Let me see, Joe?"

"All right."

Ellen spoke for the first time in a long time. "You showed her my picture?"

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" That's right, under the next streetlight we came to."

" Which one did you have? How did I look? Was I nice in it? "

" It was the snap I took of you on the school steps in our senior year. You were slim and in white and all legs, in your majorette's uniform. You know you were nice in it, but you still looked a lot to me like the girl next door."

" You needn't rub it in," Ellen said, that night last summer, in the dark beside me, and I kissed her, to let her know I was with her, and went on to the end . . .

" Nice," Vicki said, of Ellen's picture, and then she flipped over the plastic windows, one by one, that had all my other snapshots of home, Mother and Dad, and the house that stood next to the house of the girl next door, and one of our camp at the lake. Then she came to the snapshot of Ike.

" He your horse? "

" That's right. He jumps everything in sight."

" I'll bet you miss him," she said wistfully. " I always wanted a horse."

" I'll see him in a couple more weeks," I said. " I've got some leave due then."

She didn't seem to hear me. " I had a horse once," she said, " a red cloth one. I picked him out of a garbage can, and when I tried to clean him up, the colour ran. He was all over my dress when Ma came back, so she didn't let me keep him long. I don't keep anything I love very long. I guess—"

I had been watching the lovely fall of light on her face, where it left pools of shadows, full of her, aching for her, and there in the shadows I saw her eyes change.

" What is it? "

" Fist and Pimple. But don't look back to let them know I saw them. Let's just go on."

" All right. Don't hurry. We'll turn at the corner."

I took her hand, and we went on to the corner, still slowly, and turned it, and then, as soon as we were covered by the bulk of the first house, she ran, and I with her, racing over the lawns to be soundless, soaring over the pale walks as we crossed them without ever touching them. Near the end of the block, we were stopped by a hedge as high as a man, and we cut back along it, until we came at the rear to a gate that led through it. We found the hook in the dark, and opened the gate, and went through, and closed it behind us.

There was a rose arbour there, white-painted, gleaming in the dark, and beyond that, the low bulk of a tool-shed nestled snugly against the hedge in the far corner. Together, the hedge and the

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wide eaves of the shed formed a sort of tunnel, dark and safe, and Vicki drew me in there, and down beside her.

"Your dress will get dirtied, and your coat," I whispered.

"Never mind my dress," she panted. "Keep still, and listen."

I was still and listened, but all I could hear were the cars on the streets, and gun shots on the television in the house, and once someone whistling a block or two off, and the pounding of my heart, and Vicki's warm breath against my cheek.

Then she began to move beside me, and finally drew something out from beneath her.

"Look what I landed on, Joe."

She thrust it at me, and it took the tips of my fingers to tell what it was. The small curves of the eyeballs, the hard, cold nose, the ballooning, unyielding cheeks, the wave-like ridges to simulate hair—I held in my hand a doll's head.

And it was dry, not wet as it should have been, and the grass below me was dry. I reached up my arm and touched canvas. Someone, the children that played there, or their father perhaps, had tacked one side of a square of it to the edge of the eaves, and pegged the opposite side to the ground at the base of the hedge.

The gate rattled, fifty feet away, and Vicki clutched me. By straining my ears I could hear something moving, a succession of footfalls approaching.

And Vicki, trembling, found my mouth with hers in the dark, and we were still as carved stones, and then there was movement just beyond the hedge too; they had split up, we were trapped, furtive footfalls in two directions, but too light, phantom-like, hardly rustlings, wraiths almost drowned in the sea thundering from my held breath, and—

From the corner of the tool-shed, rending the night asunder and our lips apart, came the mating call of a cat.

"Vicki. Vicki."

It was later. Fist and Pimple had never shown up. We were safe, we hoped. And we had kissed. We had uttered whispered endearments. It was time to go. But—

"Joe, do you like me O.K.?"

"Oh, Vicki, you know I do." *Like* wasn't a strong enough word for it.

"You wouldn't like your folks to see me, I bet. They'd think I'm not good enough."

"Why would they?" But maybe they would. "Oh, Vicki, I think I love you."

"But the only place I could ever be your girl is some place like here, with no one to see."

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" That's simply not true," I cried. " I'd be proud to take you anywhere."

" Would you, Joe? Take me away? "

" Some day I will."

" No, now. Tonight. Because you don't know what it's like on Channel Street, and I'd leave with just the clothes on my back if you'd go. We'd find some place far away. And I'd love you, and I'd cook for you. I'd learn to like what you liked."

I was shaken for a second, wanting what she wanted, but not—I quickly realised—brave enough or fool enough, for I was brought up to go by the book, and life wasn't that simple, that irresponsible.

" I can't," I said. " I'm sorry, but I can't. I've no reason or right to desert from the Army."

She tried one more time. " You wouldn't even have to marry me," she said, " if you didn't want to."

" I would want to, except—Vicki, I can't leave now. We can't run away *now*. But we'll find a way later. Together we'll work it out."

" But you don't know—" she began. " It's got to be now, or not ever. Because—" she sought for words that she couldn't find, and gave up. " Even when I said it, Joe, I knew it wouldn't work. You got to protect yourself. I got to protect myself. But at least we had tonight."

" We'll have more than tonight." I tried to kiss her again, but she pushed me away.

" No, we won't. And we have to go now. I'm late already. She struggled up and out and, woman-like, smoothed her dress. " Oh, Joe, here's your billfold back."

I took back the billfold she'd been holding when she saw Fist and Pimple, that I'd forgotten she had, and we went away from there, past the rose arbour, and through the gate in the hedge, and back to the sidewalk. I loved her terribly then, and had no way to tell her, because I knew she was right.

She was clever too. Smarter than I, in spite of her lack of learning. Five desolate blocks beyond, a new car was pulled in against the kerb, and I found the readymade alternative to flight with Vicki. For Nick stepped out of the car when we got to it.

" Nice goin'," he said, looking approvingly at Vicki. And then to me. " We can do this easy, sucker, or we can do it tough. Either way, you'll hand over the money."

She had phoned from the bar, of course, to some pool hall or wherever she figured he was. Because Nick would want reasons for her dancing with me, when he found out from his pals, and the

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one that would save her was the one that she'd given—to set me up for him.

One look at her face—cold, withdrawn, unsurprised—and I knew I was right. She had known it would happen because she had caused it to happen.

" Better do what he says, Joe. He means it."

Oh, I knew the whole scene had been played a thousand times before, with GIs as the victims and girls as the bait, but still it didn't seem real. I looked around, and saw no help in sight. And the knife Nick held looked real enough. Deflated, betrayed, less than a man, I dug out my billfold and handed it over.

And then I found she had betrayed us both.

" Five lousy bucks," Nick burst out, extracting the five, hurling the billfold away. " Five lousy bucks! I thought you said he was loaded."

My billfold had held more than seventy.

" Honest, Nick, I thought he was. It was payday. Why wouldn't I think that?"

He slapped Vicki smartly across the face, and advanced on me. " What did you do with the rest of it? "

I gave him the facts, but let him draw the wrong inference. " I loaned some. I lost some. There was a crap game," I said. " Sorry."

But I didn't feel very sorry, and I didn't look very sorry. In fact, I laughed in his face, and that made him mad enough to put the knife away and use his fists, but before he could get in the first blow, I hit him, and I hit him, and I hit him, and he finally crashed headfirst to the sidewalk. And then I waited for him to get up, but he didn't. I knelt down. He was breathing, but he didn't seem to be conscious.

" Joe," Vicki said timidly. " Oh, Joe."

I was so anxious to tell her off that I completely forgot she still had my money.

" You bet on the wrong man," I said, " and you lost. So go on—go on back to Channel Street. That's where you really belong."

" But, Joe—"

" Get out."

She looked so small going away, so friendless and alone, that I almost called her back anyway.

Instead, I dumped Nick back in the car, and found a phone booth, and called the police, mostly because I reckoned the car was stolen, and that was what it turned out to be.

Mad as I was, I couldn't bring myself to turn Vicki in. Besides, she could hide the evidence. But if Nick got sent to prison, I

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thought, she might have some kind of a chance to break free before he got out again, make some kind of a life for herself.

Nick did get sent down, I know. I went home on leave and on to Japan, and to college and a honeymoon, and Channel Street is a long way off and a long time ago. Anyway, I never saw Vicki again.

" Repeat that last," said Ellen, from the dark beside me.

" I never saw Vicki again," I said firmly.

" But there was something more," she said. " There had to be, or you wouldn't have continued to love her when you came home that last leave, and she wouldn't have stayed in your mind ever since. So if you think you can put me at ease now by making her out worse than she was, don't. I don't want to be spared. I can't fight a shadow, and I don't want a rival who is one. So please, Joe, tell me all the truth."

So I told her all the truth.

" Two days later, there was a letter for me," I said. " The envelope was thick and pink, and it had the local postmark, but no return address. I didn't need one. I recognised her perfume. And she hadn't even spelt my name right—M-a-r-i-l instead of Merrill. And inside—"

The enclosure was still hard to bear after five years.

" Inside, Joe? " Ellen prompted.

" Not a word. Just her honour, and my guilt," I said. " Sixty-five dollars. The money she'd stolen from me to save for me, so that Nick wouldn't get it; and I'd told her off, not realising she'd been trying all along to do the best she could for both of us, or that—when I sent her away—she'd been trying to give it back. Poor Vicki."

" Not poor Vicki," Ellen sighed happily. " You may have wronged her, but you set her free, so it's lucky, scrappy, land-on-her-feet Vicki. But since you still think of her as poor Vicki, it's also lucky me. Because compassion and love aren't the same, Joe, and it isn't compassion you feel for me."

She was right, as she usually is. What I felt for her then was power and passion and privilege and pride, and a comfortable sense of belonging.

" No, I love *you*," I said, summing up, kissing her for emphasis.

" And I you, you dope." (As soon as she got back her breath.)

At some time in the telling the firefly had left, and the stars in the night sky had moved to the west, but like moonstruck blasts from plaintive Diesels, aw-n-n-king the night away, the bullfrogs bellowed on.

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DOUGHTY CHIEFTAIN

By Taylor Caldwell

YOUNG Father Robert MacBurne had just been ordained in Edinburgh when he was taken by the Bishop to his home. His lordship was by way of being Robert's uncle, oldest brother to Robert's mother, and he was a kindly soul. His house was poor, bare, and cold, with niggardly fires—all he could afford. He eyed Robert with affection, asked about the family, and gossiped a little. He was unnaturally effusive, and Robert began to feel a sensation of nasty premonition. As the Bishop's nephew, he had not exactly hoped for preferred treatment and a parish that would give him luxuries, for he knew that Scotsmen will bend themselves backwards until their heads touch their heels rather than use favouritism. So he began to fear that his uncle was about to assign him to a parish where he would be lucky to get a joint of mutton once a month.

The Bishop was short. He was also stout, which was amazing, considering the tiny funds at his disposal and the condition of his larder. Robert was convinced all his life that in some mysterious way the angels must have fed the Bishop while he slept his innocent sleep, or that sheer piety gave him his roundness of face and figure. It could have been nothing else—the angels or the piety. The Bishop was also rosy and jolly, the latter unusual for a Scotsman, and he had a high and subtle humour. He was a philosopher and a learned man, possessed of miraculous patience and great gentleness.

Robert, incessantly hungry because he was young as well as poor, was diverted from direful premonitions when he discovered that in some mystifying way his uncle had been able to secure a leg of young lamb, potatoes, some sprouts, white bread, and ale in honour of his nephew's visit, not to mention lemon-cheese tarts which made a man's mouth water at the mere look of them. (With these the

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Bishop, with noble gestures, produced a fourth of a bottle of brandy, hoarded for just this occasion.) Robert was further astonished at being offered a glass of Scotland's best whisky. He was so overcome with affection and amazement, that he almost forgot his forebodings.

He even forgot to glance apologetically at his uncle's rueful face when he took the fourth offering of young mutton, after he had first had a monster bowl of broth stiff with barley, carrots, and potatoes, a dish which would have surfeited anyone, in itself, but a hungry young priest. "My, my," marvelled the Bishop, when Robert had demolished five tarts, and inhaled several cups of tea rich with cream and sugar. "It gives an auld heart pleasure to see such an appetite. They'd not be feedin' ye well, in the Seminary, young Bob?"

Bob, blissful with food, ale, whisky and brandy and tarts, sighed dolefully. "I've nae had a meal like this since I was a lad."

And not even then, thought the Bishop, sighing. Nor, he added to himself, will I hae another, mysel'. It had all cost him three pounds, which he had been saving for a long time for this night. They retired to what the Bishop called his library, a mere hole of a little room solidly walled with books, cold as death, and with a handful of coals on the hearth. A table stood in the centre of the room, and there were two hard chairs in front of the fire, which gave out practically no heat. Robert, feeling drowsy and stuffed, would have liked to absorb that fire, but his uncle was now all brisk business. He was spreading a map on the table, his bald head shining like a big egg in the light of the one dull lamp; and, seeing that map and the Bishop's busyness, Robert's premonitions returned in full power and with dismal liveliness.

"Ye'll hae heard of the MacDougalls of auld," said the Bishop, smoothing out the map with small fat hands.

Robert had thought the MacDougalls had been well cleared out by Robert the Bruce and the stronger clans, but his uncle soon disillusioned him. No, here on this map, if Robert would please come to it, there was a small island. A flyspeck, merely, in the Outer Hebrides, which were no land-masses in themselves. His uncle informed him, with pride, that not even Haakon IV of Norway had been able to land his jarls on that island, because of the valour of the MacDougalls, and, the Bishop added as an afterthought, the general terrain facing the sea.

A Scotsman prefers to have the bad news immediately, rather than to delay it in the hope it will go away if ignored. In other words, Robert said to his uncle, the island needed a priest, and he was to be the victim. The Bishop tried to appear shocked, then he went to one of the chairs and admitted that such was the case. Robert fixed his uncle with his grim black eye, his hands planted stiffly on his knees.

MacDougall's isle supported itself by sheep-raising and the production of the hardiest wool in existence. ("I can weel onderstand that," remarked Robert.) The wool was much in demand

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for outer garments, if not for underdrawers. ("Scrape the hide off a mon, nae doot," commented Robert, forgetting the fine meal in his dismay.) It also carried on some brisk fisheries, slate-quarrying and, best of all, distilling. Robert looked up with a less anguished countenance. The Bishop nodded. "It was their whisky you had, this night," he said. Robert smiled the slightest of smiles, thinking of a hearty glass of that whisky each night before dinner, at his own fireside, perhaps with a friend who was at least partly civilised. He then asked about the weather. One knew about the weather in the Hebrides. It was the national boast that a man could get his nose frostbitten, frequently, in mid July. As for their storms—well, they admitted to a man, not without some pride, that God used the Islands as a proving-ground for storms He had in mind for the polar regions.

And MacDougall's isle, suggested Robert, was one of God's favourite spots for testing. The Bishop sat down as if suddenly tired, and nodded his head. "It hasna disappeared as yet," he said, to which Robert replied that that was damned unfortunate—for him. And who ruled this less than Paradise on earth?

The Bishop hesitated. Why, of course, the laird was Douglass MacDougall. Who else? A fine lad, in his mid-twenties, if somewhat wild, and still unmarried. Robert commented that Douglass probably carried his dirk in his teeth, his two hands being well occupied with more lethal instruments, such as maces and firearms. And, doubtless, he was as unread as any Congo bushman. The Bishop's spirits picked up. No, the lad had taken a short, but effective, medical course in Edinburgh. The reason was obvious to the alarmed Robert. There was no physician on the isle, and in addition to owning and managing the fisheries, the quarries, the cattle, and the sheep herds, and keeping general peace and order and acting as magistrate, the chieftain officiated as obstetrician, bone-setter, general practitioner, midwife and veterinary surgeon.

"He'll nae have time, then, for mischief," said Robert sombrely. "It's nae wonder he's never wedded. Nae doot a virgin, by necessity."

There was no sense in being facetious, the Bishop admonished, remembering suddenly that he was a Bishop and this young man, though his nephew, was only a fledgling priest. One had to admire the MacDougall. In addition to his medical studies, he had become exceedingly proficient in the liberal arts, the law, Latin and Greek, and sundry other things. Robert marvelled, only half believing.

Then a horrid thought came to him. How did the isle communicate with its sisters in the event of great necessity? It had a telegraph, did it not? It did not, the Bishop confessed. But, there were the fishing-boats and sailboats, which every man on the isle could handle—if the weather was not too ferocious nor the seas too high. During at least four months in the year boats from the big ships from Glasgow put in at its one usable cove, bringing necessities and taking away the salt herrings, the wool, the slates, and the

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thick homespun tweeds. And at least five months in the year the boats from MacDougall's isle called for the post on the nearest larger isle. " I think," said Robert, " that I'd prefer the Congo."

It was a sturdy and fairly prosperous place, the Bishop said. The MacDougall was a man for order and thrift and industry, and was no fool. He was also pious—in his way. The kirk was small, but in good order. Things could be much worse, said the Bishop, trying to brighten as Robert sank deeper into gloom.

Robert had missed meeting the MacDougall in Edinburgh by two days. The MacDougall had come in search of a pastor.

" A braw laddie." The MacDougall was several inches over six feet tall, all muscles and extraordinary strength, and remarkably handsome, with eyes as grey as the Atlantic, hair black and curling and lively, a strong heavy nose, and a gay but resolute mouth. There was nothing he could not do, or at least there was nothing he would not attempt.

" A difference there," Robert remarked forebodingly. The Bishop should have liked to detain him to meet his—er—new pastor, but the MacDougall had been recalled to his island because of a crisis in lambs and sheep-killing dogs.

The next day Robert was on his way to the Outer Hebrides, all the clothes and other objects he possessed in one small bag. The Bishop's ancient housekeeper had put him up a large packet—larger than his own bag by far—containing the remnants of the leg of lamb, some buttered bread and marmalade, a half bottle of whisky, oat cakes and honeyed scones, not to mention a jar of her best strawberry jam, and the rest of the lemon tartlets, which would serve him well on the cold and draughty third-class carriage on the train " to the end of the world." The Bishop had given his nephew a heavy plaid shawl, which Robert attempted to refuse, knowing how much the old man needed it himself. But the Bishop insisted, stroking the thick folds lovingly. He also gave Robert another treasure: a rosary whose beads were real Oriental pearls, all iridescence, and the crucifix was heavy solid gold, the Corpus carved of mother-of-pearl, exquisitely. These were the only treasures the Bishop had ever possessed, and he insisted that Robert must have them, as he had been saving them for this very day. The shawl smelled overwhelmingly of camphor, but it was a blessing on the train, on his shoulders when he sat up, and covering him almost head to foot like a warm blanket when he lay on the hard bench to sleep.

He had the carriage to himself, for the countryside was busy at this time of the year. Used to solitude, and a solitary by nature as were all Scotsmen, he was not lonely. He prayed, read a sound religious book, ate, slept a little, then surreptitiously took out a reprehensible yellow-backed paper novel in which he steeped and horrified his innocent soul. The racier passages were in French, and it was purely in the interests of relating French to Latin that Robert pored over them carefully, shaking his head the while and

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deploring modern tastes and the corruption of youth. Despite the shawl, his feet, in their big black boots, were getting numb with cold as the train scuttled north.

Firs, beeches, larches. Did they ever turn green and warm in this wide and brawling countryside? Chunky grey sheep appeared on the meadows, with lambs with black faces, and among them stood the lonely shepherds, wrapped in their plaid shawls from head to foot. Fierce lines of hills appeared now in the distance, russet-brown, yellowish or tinged with purple, and once or twice Robert glimpsed the terrible Atlantic, the colour of stone but tumultuous, breaking on monstrous black rocks and roaring in the inlets in a rage of white foam. May God forgive him for sending me yon, thought Robert, referring in his thoughts to his uncle, but it was not in a spirit of absolute charity and sincerity.

The end of his journey, he understood, was also the end of the railroad. His heart was in his boots. He prayed a while, then found a newspaper from Dundee with decorous headlines relating that two English spinsters had disappeared in Edinburgh three days ago and Scotland Yard was being called in. Miss Mary Joyce and her cousin, Miss Pamela Stone, were ladies of substance in London, and they had been visiting friends in Edinburgh and had gone for a carriage ride alone through the city. The coachman and the carriage had reported back to the friends. The ladies had taken a walk on Princes Street and had vanished into thin air and had never returned. Robert turned the pages listlessly, and then read the Agony Column with deep interest, being a young and imaginative man. This served to divert him until it was time for his breviary again. All was blackness outside his window. The cold grew more intense. Robert took off his boots and rubbed his numbed feet. He wrapped the shawl about them, suddenly blessing his uncle. He was as chill as death. And the train still screeched and lumbered along. The lantern swayed smokily.

A great bright white moon rose over the hills, flooding the stark countryside with a brilliant illumination. The train was running closer to the sea now; its pungent odour penetrated the compartment. Once or twice Robert saw crests radiant with icy silver, and heard the booming of the surf. Its boom and thunder became louder moment by moment, until the very walls of the carriage rumbled in answer. He saw lighthouses far out on the sea, flickering. The moon became almost fierce in its arctic splendour. The snow patches, though this was May, were larger and whiter. There was a scent of pine and fir, too, poignant, overwhelming.

Then the train, gasping, spent, came abruptly to a halt, and there was a hissing of steam. Robert sat. A guard came in, lifted his eyebrows politely. " It will be the end," he said.

" Aye, and that it is," said Robert, rising stiffly and staggering a little because his legs were so cold and numb. He flung the shawl about his shoulders, put on his hat, tucked up the last remnants of his journey into his bag, and murmured a prayer. He glanced through the window. The train had stopped at a mere cluster of

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stony little buildings like huts. One lantern blew against the moon. There was not a soul in sight.

Stumbling to the corridor, Robert halted as if shot. A loud and ear-crushing wail had assaulted him, like all the fiends in hell. A crimson flare lit up the windows of the corridor, and Robert knew they were torches. Now war drums joined the wailing and the sound of tramping feet, and Robert understood that a detachment of very large Highlanders, fully equipped with bagpipes—and doubtless with dirks and maces—were impatiently waiting outside and were serenading an arrival. He wondered who it could be. A laird, perhaps, or a great landowner.

The corridor remained empty. The train appeared entirely empty. There was no hail. But the torches flared into a deep crimson and fluttered like flags; the music became more triumphant, more excited. The Highlanders had caught sight of his pale boyish face peering through the corridor window. Now the drums went mad until they rumbled like thunder, and a hoarse and mighty shout went up. By the light of the torches, Robert could now see the Highlanders in full dress, their kilts swirling about the biggest knees he had ever seen in his life; each monolithic face opened in a bellow of greeting; the major-domo tossed his baton, recovered it with a yell. Scotsmen, Robert knew, came in all sizes, but these sizes were immense. Not a man was under six feet tall, and most were much taller, so that their enormous bearskin hats towered to a giant height.

"No, no, it canna be for me," Robert prayed, as the men marched up and down before, not below, the corridor window and the guard beamed at him and ducked his head, and then pulled the bag from his hand, seized his elbow with deference, and led him to the door.

"Ah, and it's the MacDougall himsel' who's come for you, sir," said the guard, himself amazed that all this savage greeting and uproar could be for one so thin and black and shabby and hardly more than a lad.

"Oh no," murmured Robert. Then he uttered a cry himself, for he was literally seized by a pair of tremendous hands and lifted down from the steps as though he were a child, and a feeble, frail one at that. The hands set him down and, not short himself, he had to peer up into a handsome face all grey dancing eyes, big nose, and laughing mouth filled with enormous white teeth.

"Aye, and it's a welcome to you this braw nicht, Faether!" said a booming voice, and Robert knew that it was the MacDougall in full regalia who had handled him as an infant.

The bagpipes screamed, the drums roared, the torches danced, and the men marched about their laird and their priest, their knees pumping high and hard, their heels coming down like earthquakes on the hard and stony soil. The MacDougall put his titan's hands on his hips and surveyed his priest critically, smiling from ear to ear. "And they wouldna send me a greybeard!" he shouted. "They sent me a puling laddie with a face like milk! Niver ye mind, Faether! We'll be fattenin' ye up!" And with this he

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smote Robert heartily on the back and then caught him deftly in mid flight and set him gingerly on his feet again.

Robert coughed and strangled and blinked, then when he could catch his breath he remembered that he was a priest "for a' that," and entitled to respect even though this was the MacDougall in person. "Ye'll keep your hands to yoursel'," he said with feeble severity, swallowing his last cough.

The small parade marched about him. The bitterest of winds tore at his shawl and his hat and trousers; his knees trembled with cold, his eyes moistened at the flare and glare of the torches, his ears rang. Never had he seen such a plaid as was now displayed to him as in acres. His own plaid, allegedly Royal Stuart, paled like the moon before the sun. It was the most gorgeous plaid he had ever gazed upon, and he winced. If the MacDougalls did nothing else, they believed in the wildest colours. Tassels swung from side to side; boots pounded, shawls danced in the wind like sails. And there was a rifle slung from every mighty shoulder.

The MacDougall, reproved by his young priest, bowed deeply from the waist, but not before Robert had seen the glint of deviltry in those fine eyes. "It's but a welcome for you, Faether," he said. "And glad we are to see you. Lads!" he cried, and the lads stopped abruptly, and raised a shout that lifted the hair on Robert's skull. Hills roared it back; it even drowned out the yelling sea.

His bag disappeared. Now he dimly saw that he stood very close to the ocean. Black rocks, like miniature mountains, poured with water and foam. Robert's nose and hands promptly lost all sensation. There were boats drawn up in the tiniest of coves, and there, near the boats, Robert saw six Dominican Sisters, tall and grim, their hands folded primly in their sleeves, their coifs glittering in mingled moonlight and torchlight. All, he thought vaguely, well booted for this weather.

He suddenly wanted to lie down somewhere and go to sleep and wake to his little room in the Seminary or in his uncle's house. He was exhausted. He did not remember climbing into a boat which rocked under him. His head was whirling and aching and he was shuddering and certain he was about to expire of cold. Then the great waves were tossing under him and there were other boats following, and he groaned. The men were singing now, some barbaric ballad concerning the freedom of the MacDougalls.

Though a Scotsman, Robert was no sailor. He particularly regretted the last two lemon tarts he had eaten a couple of hours ago. He clung to the side of the boat. The MacDougall sat like a giant beside him and smiled at him in the moonlight, and the men sang. The MacDougall, all by himself, sang the choruses.

The terrible ocean was lighted resplendently by the moon, so that the boats appeared to toss in refulgent liquid silver. So intense was the illumination that Robert was forced to close his eyes; it was a nightmare moon that hung in the sky, polished by polar winds, burnished by arctic ice. It faded the stars; it made the whole desolate ocean glitter. Little island after little island came

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in sight, fell astern and disappeared, and still others lifted themselves blackly, as if made and carved of basalt, and advanced upon the boats, like crawling sea monsters or sluggish turtles, and fell back as did the others.

We'll never get there; we'll be lost at sea, thought Robert in despair, and fumbled for his uncle's rosary. The boats pushed into the waves, rose upon them, glided down into black and shining trenches, rose again on moon-shining crests.

The MacDougall had been singing alone for some time and now he was singing a doleful love ballad which boomed back from the water. He was happy; his voice broke.

Or did misfortune's bitter storms
Around thee blaw, around thee blaw,
Thy bield should be my bosom,
To share it a', to share it a'!

Robert turned his swimming head cautiously and thought with some spite that the damsel invited to share that bosom would have yards to choose from, so broad it was, so muscular. In fact, she could set up a cot on it. But there was no doubting, as the MacDougall, continuing to offer his lady-love the might of his arm and his sword and other implements of warfare, sang as a man sings who is in love, and rejoices in it.

He was apparently a man of singular empathy, for he had noticed the terror and the misery of his priest, and the efforts he was making not to disgrace the priesthood, and that he was cold and despairing, for though Douglass beamed encouragingly on Robert he went on singing. Now it was *Mary o' Argyle*, and Robert could not help thinking that he had an unco fine voice, for all its gigantic echoes.

"*'Twas your eyes, my gentle Mary——!*" sang the MacDougall, and there was actually a tremolo in his throat, and his eyes glistened in the moonlight as if moistened by tears of passion and devotion.

Gentle Mary! thought the priest. In this God-abandoned place of wind and ocean and black islands sliding by in lightless silence? The boats went on swiftly over the water.

Just when Robert had finally given up hope, the MacDougall halted his singing in the very midst of describing his lady's fairness of countenance and pointed to what appeared to Robert to be a huge mass of rock jutting high up from the argent floor of the ocean.

"MacDougall's isle," he said proudly, "and all your souls, Faether."

"Not—that?" quavered Robert. "It isna but mountain against the moon."

"MacDougall's isle," repeated Douglass joyously. He lifted his huge hand as if to smite Robert again in welcome but halted it in the air as the priest winced back in fright, waiting to be whisked off into the water. The MacDougall coughed apologetically. "It's me hame, the hame of a' the MacDougalls, and none can land but he that knows the cove and the way." He beamed upon the priest. "Not sae long now, Faether. It's the westlin wind we hae tonight,

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for a' the moon, and ye'll soon be warm by your ain fire in your ain cot, with a good dinner under your ribs."

Poor Robert shuddered again. "And tomorrow," said the MacDougall, "I'll take ye aboot the isle for your folk to see ye and be proud." He was very goodhearted; he could not see how his folk could possibly be proud of this thin, bony lad who for all his good Scotsman's craggy profile was too narrow of shoulder.

The boats grated on rough sand, and the isle towered over them, black as midnight, terrible as a fortress, silent as death. Robert made no protest this time when the MacDougall lifted him gently and bodily out of the boat and set down his feet on the slipping sand as carefully as he would have handled a babe. To tell the truth, Robert would have appreciated being carried so easily to his rectory, and would have blessed the MacDougall for his mercy.

He started violently; the pipers had begun again, the torches were relit, the drums thundered. He was going to be piped to his rectory, and for a moment he wished he were dead and quietly buried in some sweet spot under a cypress tree.

There was no carriage to carry him, the MacDougall informed him with that abominable cheerfulness of his. There was not a carriage on the isle. A man needed but a horse, and there was a fine horse for the Faether, as gentle as a lamb. "And nae doot it clambers like a goat," said the weary Robert. The MacDougall thought this a splendid joke and roared, tucked the priest's arm firmly under his and helped him climb up a rocky little path that was almost vertical and paved by the moon. The pipers and the drummers followed without the least difficulty, but Robert stumbled. He wondered about the Dominican Sisters, but stopped wondering when he saw them briskly and forthrightly lifting their skirts high to their boot-tops and climbing as easily as the men.

His first sensation when he climbed up the lip of the hill and was on fairly level ground, considering, was that he had arrived in a small world exclusively built of glittering black stone and blazing silver light. Cobbled roadway, small broad houses, walls, buildings of all sorts, were of glistening, sparkling, darkest granite; the slates were dark on the roofs. But the windows shone with lamps in honour of the arriving priest, and shawled men and women raised a shout of welcome to which Robert, still staggering from the boat trip, could not reply except by a lifting of a very tremulous hand. He saw the spire of his church down the street, brilliant with light, and its sturdy small bulk, and he knew his rectory was nigh, for which he heartily thanked God. He stumbled on the cobbles, but the MacDougall held him firmly, and the pipers piped, the torches threw red shadows on the dark houses, and the drums pealed back from mountain and house front. Robert caught a glimpse of more little narrow streets winding off, each window gay with light.

For all his thinness and youth, he was strong and wiry, but the long day's journey, the intense cold and, above all, the long boat trip had left him dwindled. His stomach still heaved; the street rocked under him. Then a door was thrown open and red firelight

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and lamplight streamed out like loving arms to embrace him and he was in his rectory. He looked at the fire, tore his arm from the MacDougall, and ran to the fire and stood bowed before it as close as he could get without absolutely charring himself. And this was the month of May, merry May, flowery May, lovely May—the month of the Queen of Heaven!

The pipers kept up their howling outside, and the drums still drummed, but the walls were thick. Consequently, the pipers' valiant music was muted within the little parlour, which was most cosily furnished with rocking-chairs and tidies and woollen woven rugs in bright colours. And a huge fire, above all. The Sisters came in with the MacDougall, who was bellowing something, and a small plump body with white hair came bouncing into the parlour, all grey calico and white apron.

"Mistress MacDougall!" said the MacDougall in his big virile voice. "A footbath, hot, for the wee lad, at once."

Mistress MacDougall, elderly and violently rosy, curtseyed to the shivering priest, and bounced back into the tiny kitchen, nodding and beaming. Robert crouched closer to the fire. His stomach had stopped heaving; it was making healthy and plaintive sounds, demanding supper. Robert glanced over his shoulders and shrank at the sight of the formidable Sisters, not one who did not tower almost as tall as himself, and all of whom, if one was to judge from their dour expressions, had even this early a poor opinion of him.

The MacDougall, who never stopped talking, it seemed, and on whom the Sisters bestowed wintry but affectionate smiles, helped the old housekeeper carry in a steaming copper of hot water, then thrust Robert into a chair before the fire. It did no good to protest; off came his boots, his long darned black stockings, and then his trouser legs and underwear were rolled up in a twinkling and his white thin calves exposed to the unmoved gaze of the Sisters. The MacDougall seized those calves in one mighty hand and pushed Robert's feet into the copper. Now Robert bellowed, long and loud, without restraint.

The MacDougall listened approvingly. "It's a braw voice," he admitted, and the Sisters, for the first time, looked without grimness at Robert, who was certain the flesh was being melted from his bones in the hot water. Billows of steam rose to his very nostrils, but after an agonised moment his cold flesh expanded gratefully.

"Weel, we'll be leavin' ye to your good dinner and the fire, laddie," said the MacDougall, after he was sure Robert was not going to bubble in the copper. "It is Mass tomorrow at half after four, for the men must be at their work, and there is Mass at six for the women and the bairns. A guid night to ye, then, laddie, and a guid sleep. It is late een now, eight on the hour."

He strode out, followed by the unspeaking Sisters, and the pipers started up once more, and the door banged. Laddie! thought Robert, with indignation. And I a priest! He suddenly yelled, for Mistress MacDougall was pouring fresh hot water from a kettle into the copper. "Enough, woman!" he screamed.

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Mistress MacDougall set up a table at his side. He had not yet heard her voice, but he knew that his countrywomen were as sparing of words as were his countrymen. Except for the MacDougall, he thought with considerable bitterness. If he's nae talking he's singing, and God knows which is worse, an unfair thought which Robert regretted at once.

Not a talker himself, Robert still wished for some human communication. He said to his housekeeper, "Ye be a MacDougall, too, Mistress?"

"We a' be MacDougalls, Faether," she answered in her Highland accent. "Every last man and woman and bairn and wean on the isle." She spoke proudly, and busily poured thick mutton soup into a white bowl at Robert's elbow. "But none sae proud and guid and strong as Douglass MacDougall, our laird." Her voice dropped reverently, and for the first time a faint uneasiness came to Robert, which as yet had no name. But he plunged his big pewter spoon into his big bowl of soup, which was giving off unbearably delicious odours, and he took up several enormous hot mouthfuls before he would speak again. His feet were warming in the copper; his right shoulder was just slightly steaming from the fire; his thin cheek was very hot. His whole young body rejoiced in all this lamplit comfort. He finished the soup, and saw Mistress MacDougall's bright blue eye shining on him with approval. She then brought a platter of cold mutton, mustard, hot boiled cabbage and potatoes, hot scones and wheat cakes, and a bottle of whisky. She poured Robert a glass of whisky, neat, and he took it and smelled it and rolled it about in his glass.

"Best in the world," said Mistress MacDougall proudly. "It is his lairdship's ain, and made on the isle."

Now, this was illegal, unless the MacDougall had a licence from the Sassenach. Robert guessed that he had no such licence, and that if MacDougall's isle were little known it was not simply because of its arctic isolation. There was such a thing as discretion.

"Half after four is an unco early hour for first Mass," he said.

"The MacDougall hae decreed it, for our convenience," said the housekeeper in a reproving voice. Her face was like a round red apple, slightly wrinkled, and the bright blue eyes were suddenly cold. "A guid word to ye, Faether. Dinna cross the MacDougall."

Robert bridled as well as he could with a mouthful of lamb in his jaws and a big bite of hot buttered scone. "I will cross the MacDougall," he said, after several swallows, "on a' occasions he needs it."

The housekeeper folded her hands under her apron. She lifted her eyes, but not to the crucifix standing over the granite stone mantel with its iron candlesticks upon it. "It weel be the worst for ye, Faether," she said. "The MacDougall—" and she dropped her voice again in that note Robert had heard before, to his uneasiness—"he willna brook interference. He is the laird."

"There is a Laird above him," said Robert. "And He I serve, and not the MacDougall."

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Mistress MacDougall crossed herself dutifully, but her eye sparkled. She studied Robert as one would study a weak calf, the young priest thought with resentment. She smiled. Nodded. She brought the teapot, pewter and steaming, and filled an enormous cup with tea and produced brownish sugar and a pitcher of cream so thick it hardly touched the sides of the vessel. And there were cakes full of raisins. Robert forgot his resentment for a moment.

"Ye hae a guid appetite, thank God, Faether," said Mistress MacDougall.

"I'll be needing it here," said Robert, eating a fifth little cake.

"Weel, your clothes—they are nae so warm," said the housekeeper. "But the MacDougall will hae a care for that. And the vestments. A prince would want no mair lovely, waiting ye in the vestry."

"I hae me own," said Robert severely.

Mistress MacDougall shook her head with indulgence. "Ye'll wear what the MacDougall, the laird, bought in London Town."

Robert was immediately determined that he would wear his own, come the MacDougall or hell itself. He was not a Scotsman for nothing. His uneasiness returned, fumbling around in his mind for a name. "Do ye all love the MacDougall as you, Mistress MacDougall?"

Her face changed to an expression more appropriate for the Communion rail than for a human being.

"Ah, that we do! He is our laird and our master, Faether!"

"Why?"

"Why, Faether? His word is law." Her voice dropped to servility, and Robert's Scots scalp prickled. Scotsmen were the proudest of all men; servility never sounded on their tongues, but servility sounded now on the lips of Mistress MacDougall.

"That is tyranny!" exclaimed Robert.

"Tyranny, Faether?" Mistress MacDougall was puzzled. "We owe sae much to the MacDougall, and his faether, and his faether before him, and all his faethers. He is the Law—"

"And the prophets, too, nae doot," said Robert, whose black eye was glittering. "We'll see aboot this! And Scots ye call yeselves!"

Mistress MacDougall, with a look that did not promise the young priest would be alive much longer, said nothing more. Silently, with slight gestures, she introduced Robert to his rectory. By this time he had put on his stockings and boots. His bedroom had a small fire, for which he was grateful, for all he was steaming inside and out.

Robert glanced at the big tester bed and was suddenly overcome with the desire to get under all those feathers and blankets. He dismissed Mistress MacDougall, who lived next door with her husband and three sons. He galloped, regrettably, through his prayers, pulled off his clothing, and fell into the white bosom of his feather bed and rolled in it luxuriously. For an instant or two he listened to the wind and then sank into one of the soundest sleeps of his life, unaware of the great white moon peering in his window.

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Robert woke to absolute darkness and to the sound of warning bells in the belfry of his church. He felt around for the candle and lit it. Four o'clock, on an icy May morning. The fire had long since died. Mistress MacDougall would not be at the rectory until after six o'clock Mass. He was on his own until then. He had but half an hour to dress and hurry into his church and prepare.

Reluctantly, for he was still so young, he climbed out of the embrace of his warm bed, and immediately shivered, even under his flannel nightshirt. He touched the water in the pitcher, wincing. He hurried through his shaving and washing. Then he looked for the clothing he had dropped so hastily last night and wondered, dismally, how he could wear it in this climate. It had been warm enough even for Edinburgh, which was never warm. Then he discovered that while he had slept his underwear had been replaced by garments which appeared to have been woven of oatmeal, and were as thick as blankets. He bridled, then decided that comfort was not proscribed by the Church and that it was expected that priests take reasonable care of themselves as a duty. The undergarments were not soft, but slightly resembled hairshirts. However, Robert was no sooner inside them and buttoning them than they became like swansdown in that chill. His woollen stockings, so lovingly knitted by his mother, had been replaced by black stockings that were so heavy they could have stood alone. He pulled them on rapidly. His toes were already cold. His habit had been replaced by one more suitable to the climate, and it, too, could have stood on its own.

Warmly dressed though he was, he still shivered when he shut the door of the rectory behind him, for the wind was arctic and as sharp as a razor. If I had worn my own, he admitted to himself, I should have had the lung-fever before night. Shapeless bundles of huge men were already wending their silent way along the black, silent streets when Robert let himself into the kirk. The sacristan was already waiting, an old and vigorous man, and two altar boys so warmly clad that they were without form, their faces perched on top of all that clothing like ripe pears on top of small barrels. They greeted him respectfully. The alb, he discovered, was of thick white wool and not linen. He paused at this. Then, as he was shuddering in the sacristy, he pulled on the alb and said his prayers.

This was the fourth Tuesday after Easter. Robert gazed at the vestments laid out for him by the proud altar boys, and he thought not even the Bishop, his uncle, had ever worn vestments so fine, so beautifully embroidered, so gleamingly silky, so delicate. He was almost afraid to touch them. The tiny room seemed small and comfortingly warm to him as he prayed, and he never gave a thought to the thick underwear he was wearing. While he was being arrayed in splendour he peeped through the door of the sacristy.

The church was small and everything in it, including even the high altar, was of glistening dark granite. The floor was granite and so were the walls, all smooth as a girl's hand and all shining in the light of the candles. It might be as cold and austere as death in

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there, but baskets of frail May flowers stood before each statue, and every statue was Italian of the best quality, and the crucifix over the altar was marvellously large and brilliantly executed, worthy of a cathedral. It was still black with night outside, but the candles shone on the tiny beauty of stained-glass windows, like jewels.

Robert could see that the linen was of the finest, too, and richly dowered with lace, and gleamed like snow. The pews were already filling with men, and, of course, the formidable Sisters were there in the first pew, with prayerful but also watchful expressions. A man coughed hoarsely.

Then Robert saw that the vessels glowed and he thought that they must at the very least be silver heavily gold-plated.

This was a said Mass, on a weekday, and there was no organ note. Robert wondered if he had an organ at all, and then, arrayed at last, he thought of the MacDougall, whom he was beginning to dislike—God forgive him—and he was certain there would be an organ. A slight trembling overcame the young man—his ain church, his ain people, his ain parish, and he had been flung into it all without the slightest briefing. Then he firmed his knees and valiantly entered the church to the rough sound of people rising. His eyes blurred, and not at the candlelight. He prayed he would be worthy—

"Alleluia, alleluia. Dextera Domini fecit virtutem, dextera Domini exaltavit me . . ."

His voice rang sharp and strong against the granite, and he was heartened by it. When after Mass he turned to his people, and he was already thinking of them as such, and gave the final blessing, he was almost ready to weep. The old Sister Superior saw his emotion, and while she bowed her head she prayed somewhat sombrely for him and hoped that he would be "up to it."

It was still dark outside when Robert emerged from the church. There were no street lamps, of course, but the men carried lanterns which they had thriftily not lit before when the moon still gave illumination. Now they lighted them, and touched their caps to their priest. He was afraid to meet the Sisters face to face just now, remembering his forced, indecent display of naked legs before them the night before, and he hurried to his rectory.

The cold dawn began to filter through his tight little windows, and his hungry stomach clamoured. He lit a fire in the kitchen; he lit one in his bedroom. He prayed. He paced. It was time to go into the church again, and this time he marched under the wan light, and thought how stony and gloomy this hamlet was, perched on its mountain ledge.

What he had thought of as a mountain was a large rough crag, on a shelf of which the hamlet huddled with its meagre, narrow, and winding streets. The rest of the island, though hardly flat, and though still almost inaccessible, did have mountain meadows and other tillable land and little lakes and ponds and springs. There was

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a fringe of fishing-vessels tied up below, near the cove, and now as the dawn brightened icily Robert could hear the far hailing of the men, virile and powerful against the bitter air. He peered down and saw the monstrous Atlantic, ashen and turbulent, rushing with crests. And nothing else. Apparently this was the farthermost island. How did, in all wonder, the MacDougall and his people truly exist in this watery and stony wilderness? Ah, he, Robert, had it! They produced whisky in their mountain stills, all illegal, and they smuggled it out! The fine appointments in the church were now explained. And possibly, thought Robert, entering the church again, there was more than whisky smuggled.

The MacDougall himself was at the last Mass, among all the awed and respectful women and half-grown children, surrounded by his men. (Did they not work? Or were they his bodyguard?) The MacDougall was piety itself. He came to the Communion rail and gave Robert a brief and sparkling grey glance, as chill and untamed as the ocean. Robert was slightly unnerved, meeting that glance. It had none of the hearty friendliness of the night before.

He was waiting for Robert when the young priest emerged from the church, and his great men stood near him, the rifles slung on their shoulders. But now the MacDougall was as gay as a youth and as affectionate. The Faether would do him the honour of partaking dinner with him that night, and learn more of his parish, and inspect the horse waiting now in the stables of the laird. Robert wanted to refuse. The MacDougall reached out a huge hand and rested it briefly on the priest's shoulder. The lads would call for him that evening. As for the rest of the day, the Faether could inspect the schools with the Sister Superior, the MacDougall's second cousin.

Robert looked at the hand on his shoulder without moving, and said nothing. The MacDougall became silent. Robert still stared at the hand. The MacDougall removed it and laughed. "The auld Faether was ma ain faether's cousin," he said.

"I am nae cousin to ye, sir," said Robert. The great bodyguard looked at him in astonishment.

"Sad, that," said the MacDougall. His handsome red lips were smiling and without falsity. "We are a' MacDougalls here."

"Inbreeding," said Robert coldly.

"Nae mair than the Irish." He studied Robert. "There's a wee touch of the Irish in ye, Faether, perhaps?"

"If ye'll excuse me," said Robert, and marched into his house and banged the door after him. He could hear the noise echo back from the great crag that loomed over the hamlet, and he wondered wretchedly if he would ever get used to it.

Mistress MacDougall was already bustling in the kitchen and there was a fine odour of oatmeal, baking scones and kippered herring and tea in the air, and Robert, whose cheeks were quite flushed with mingled cold and anger, suddenly was intensely interested. He sat down and ate one of the heartiest breakfasts of his life, and Mistress MacDougall was proud of his appetite.

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" Hae none of ye, man, woman, bairn, sheep-herder, farmer, shopkeeper, any life of your ain? " he demanded.

" But, Faether, he is the MacDougall, the laird . . ."

" Granted he is a hero, and his faethers before him, but he is just a man, if your present laird," said Robert.

The thought of the MacDougall being only a man among men shocked the old lady.

" And he isna married, nor breeding another MacDougall," said the priest. " Is that his duty to ye a' and his isle? "

Mistress MacDougall coloured very vividly, and suddenly changed the subject, and Robert was intrigued. " He'll be going to Skye or one of the others, for his bride," he said with satisfaction. " There's a limit to consanguinity."

" Ye'll hae more tea, Faether? " said Mistress MacDougall with much haste.

He saw he would get no more out of her, and retired to his bedroom for prayers.

He felt that there was something sinister about the MacDougall's great men who were waiting for him that cold bright evening when he left the church, though each red and rugged face appeared respectful enough, and each red chapped knee below the kilt bent a little in respect. He felt like an honoured but well-guarded prisoner when he was led through the streets to what the captain referred to as the MacDougall's Castle. The captain, almost as tall as the MacDougall himself, looked down at Robert, who had always considered himself uncommonly well grown. I feel squat, he thought resentfully. Do they breed nothing but giants here?

The escorts' feet rang on the cobbles as if they were shod with iron. Chimneys smoked busily over every slate roof. There was no colour at all but for the gardens, which amazingly were filled with scarlet and purple and yellow blooms. But the prevailing colour of the hamlet, except for the gardens, was black and grey. However, the view from every side was magnificent and awe-inspiring, the ocean was everywhere, lined on distant crests with touches of crimson from the sun in its overpoweringly wide sky, its sky of the palest cold azure. And the west! It was a conflagration, as though the whole world were burning, going up in one vast if silent explosion of red and green and yellow fire, with the eye of doom in the very centre, larger than any sun Robert had ever seen, a red eye which could have held a dozen ordinary suns. MacDougall's isle stood alone, a black crag against the sunset.

The streets of the hamlet had given way to hedgerows, pungent with the life of May. There was a scent of lilacs and the innocent and carnal earth.

And there was the " castle," with its gravel paths. A black-grey granite house, three storeys tall, bulky, forbidding, but lighted at every window, and guarded by two giants in full regalia with their rifles over their shoulders. They saluted smartly. The double door of oak, fortified with iron, swung open and there was the granite hall with its iron lanterns and candles, its ancient blowing

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banners, its enormous fireplace and armour, its throne like seats of black oak, its bearskin rugs, its emblazoned coat of arms.

The bodyguard left Robert, and a tall man in kilts approached him, bowing only a little, and led him into a vast room similar to the hall, with a fire roaring on a hearth that could accommodate six men standing abreast, and hoary portraits on the panelled walls. Here was all the pride of the MacDougalls, pale and painted face, fierce black eyes, long or short curling black hair, plaids, swords, brawny knees, delicate bosoms. Firelight and candlelight: they were part of the past and they were alive. They had never died in the MacDougall, he who resembled those on the walls who were long ago dust.

Now the MacDougall himself entered, blazing with vitality and colour, kilted, dirked, bareheaded, his hand extended cordially, palm up to show that he carried no concealed weapon. He shook hands with heartiness. "Welcome to this hoose, which has been honoured, Faether," he said, "and I hope ye leave a blessing behind."

The MacDougall called for whisky, and he pulled a great chair to the fire for the priest, then sat opposite him, his mighty knees red and glowing with chaps and health. He shook his head. "Ah, ye should have known the auld Faether! He was here every Saturday nicht, leaving his blessing! Puir old mon!"

"He died, I think, at the age of well over a hundred?"

"Puir auld mon," repeated the MacDougall sadly, as if he spoke of a man in his vigorous middle age who had been called, untimely, to his grave. But the MacDougall, wishing to leave doleful subjects alone, asked Robert how he had found his parish. Robert admitted it was all far better than he had expected, and he asked when summer arrived, which made the MacDougall merry again. He assured the priest that it was practically high summer this very day. Weather fit for a king; wonderful for the lungs; bracing; brisk. The fire roared, but Robert's new thick underwear was not a millimetre too heavy.

The MacDougall promised him a coat lined with fur for the winter. "No doot I'll sleep in it, too," said Robert. But no, there would be fur rugs for his bed.

"Ye'll not freeze," said Douglass with a slight disdain for the city man. He refilled Robert's glass. The whisky was excellent, and Douglass' eye sparkled with pleasure when Robert praised it. "The auld Faether had a bottle a day, for his blood," said Douglass. "Ye'll be well supplied from me ain kegs," he promised Robert generously.

"And now we'll have the sherry for the ladies," said the MacDougall, and smote the bell so that it sounded like a gong.

"The ladies?" said Robert.

"Me future bride, Mary Joyce, and her cousin and chaperone, Pamela Stone," said the MacDougall, with a hint of impatience. "Hae no one told ye of their presence in ma hoose?"

The names rang vaguely in Robert's brain, which was

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already ringing with the whisky. He admitted his ignorance.

"Sassenach ladies," said the MacDougall. "Ma guests. Niver did I think a MacDougall would take a Sassenach bride, but God disposes, is it nae true?"

"True," said Robert. "No one told me."

Then he remembered the newspaper from Dundee which he had read on the train and he started so violently that the whisky in his glass splashed on his hand. "The ladies who disappeared in Edinburgh, with Scotland Yard on their trail!" he exclaimed.

"They didna disappear," said the MacDougall reasonably. "If 'twere so, why would they be here?"

"But their friends, they were visiting!" cried Robert. "They didna know!"

"Do Edinburgh folk know aught?" asked the MacDougall superbly.

Robert stared at him. A horrid thought flitted into his mind. "Did the ladies come on their ain?"

"I escorted them," said Douglass, and smote the bell again. "I, and my lads."

"Ye—no, ye did not!" said Robert, appalled.

"I did," said the MacDougall. "I see we do not have a stupid priest, and thank the guid God for that," he added piously. "I dislike cracking a mon's skull to put a thought in it."

Robert carefully put down his whisky. He was very pale. "Ye came to the rail to receive Holy Communion," he said. "And ye in mortal sin!"

The MacDougall stared him down, and now he was formidable. "A MacDougall chooses his bride," he said. "It isna for the lass to choose."

"Kidnapping!" said Robert. "A crime. A criminal!"

The MacDougall became even more formidable. "Not sae harsh with the evil words, Faether. I chose my bride, and I brought her here to marry me, and ye'll witness the wedding. Enough?"

"Not enough," said the young priest, clenching his fists on his knees. "I'll nae marry a criminal kidnapper to an unwilling lass."

"She isna unwilling," said Douglass. "What lass would reject the MacDougall and all he is? She is but coy. If, Faether, ye are thinking I hae already taken her by force, clear your un-Christian thoughts away. The lass is as virtuous as the day she was born."

Robert's aghast mind could hardly absorb the enormity of the story. Over a week ago the MacDougall had gone to Edinburgh to see the Bishop about a new pastor, and to bring the pastor to his isle. He was enjoying a fine morning of sun and flowers on Princes Street when a carriage drove by, and in that carriage were two handsome young ladies. He immediately fell in love with one who turned out to be Miss Mary Joyce of London Town. The young ladies alighted from their carriage, opened their parasols, and strolled among the flowers, and the MacDougall had followed them and had contrived to introduce himself to them. Matters

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were not solved so easily; Mary was not to be wooed and won, if at all, like a barbarian. Douglass must visit her parents in London, preferably next Christmas, on her twentieth birthday. The very idea of visiting London had stupefied the MacDougall, and the very thought of waiting over half a year for his bride enraged him.

Everyone, the two girls and their host and hostess, thought this all too amusing for words. They did not take Douglass seriously. So Douglass brooded. He returned to the little inn where he was staying and he brooded all night.

Next day as he was with some of his men, he came upon an interesting sight.

The girls were in a carriage with their hostess, leaving for the railway station, for they had become bored with Edinburgh. A cart, following them, carried the maid, Agnes, and all the girls' considerable luggage. Later, girls, hostess, maid, and luggage formed an island in the centre of the hurrying station on this day of dark rain and wind. A Highlander in city clothes came to the hostess with a " message " from her husband in the City, and as it was confidential he drew her to a little distance. The station was very crowded, with trains hooting and spilling steam and soot and passengers scurrying with umbrellas and the lanterns bobbing about. No one heard the maid scream, but the hostess, who had been given a very trivial message indeed, and totally nonexistent, she discovered later, arrived back at the spot where she had left her guests and their luggage, to find that guests and luggage had disappeared completely. The maid was screaming of " masked men " who had seized the young ladies.

" I took Pamela Stone with us, also," said the MacDougall to the priest, virtuously. " It wouldna have done for her to travel alone with men, she unchaperoned."

The MacDougall's men and himself rode back all the way, with the carriage and the weeping young female prisoners. Pamela had stopped weeping on the third day and had begun to sing, to the MacDougall's pleasure, and he would join her. But Mary had only cried, wrung her hands, " and behaved like daft," said the MacDougall, with indulgence.

" Ye call it daft to object to being kidnapped? " cried Robert.

" A mon chooses his bride," said the MacDougall with amazement that anyone could be so obtuse as not to understand this simple fact.

" And that's a', save for the wedding. Had the auld Faether been here there'd be no talk of kidnappings and crimes and daftness. We'd be married the day."

Vexed, he smote the bell again and the manservant came in and said the ladies asked to be excused this night from dining with their involuntary host.

" They'll nae insult the Faether! " shouted the MacDougall, rising to his immense height. " Bring 'em doon at once, or I'll go mesel' and carry them doon! "

The manservant coughed. The ladies, he explained, enjoying

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every moment, were Church of England. They did not care for the company of Romans, especially priests.

The MacDougall told the man to deliver his message to the ladies or they'd rue the day—and in a few moments they arrived, haughtily and silently.

The first to enter was doubtless Miss Pamela Stone, thought the priest, tall and slender and lissome in a bustled dress of blue silk, and with blue silk slippers on her narrow feet. She was all English, from her slim, tearose face, stern pink lips, large pale blue eyes and smooth golden hair swept to the top of her head, whence it then descended in a cascade of glistening curls to her shoulders. She looked not once at the MacDougall, but gave Robert a glacial glance from under white lids like marble and then half turned away in the very centre of the room. Robert disliked her immediately.

The other young lady, doubtless Miss Mary Joyce, was quite different, for which the slightly dizzy Robert was grateful. Smaller, but with the daintiest figure clad in yellow silk, she had an oval, pointed face, tinted warmly with scarlet and olive, and her black and curling hair fell down to her shoulders in a glistening tide from behind her pretty ears. She was winning and beautiful at first sight, with dimples about a rich full mouth, a tilted nose that hinted of Irish blood, and eyes so full and black and shining and so brimming with mischief and joy that Robert was immediately her champion, ready to defend her with his life and rescue her from her direful condition. Her ears sparkled with long gold and diamond ornaments, and there was a ring of diamonds about her soft and girlish throat.

But it was not to her, this charming and delightful girl, that the MacDougall went and bowed before. It was to the proud fair lady, tall and stiff as a young tree and about as yielding. She refused his outstretched hand, but breeding and courtesy impelled her to turn imperially on her heel and stare at the priest, a cold and repelling stare.

" Miss Mary Joyce," said the MacDougall almost humbly, and with open pride. " And our new priest, Faether MacBurne, who welcomes ye in my hoose."

I do not! thought Robert vehemently, and he did not know if his outrage came from the thought of the kidnapping or from the idea that the MacDougall, with all his splendour and glory, should love such a lass as this—lovely, aye, but like granite, and as kind.

The other girl was surveying all this with eyes glimmering with mirth, and the dimples deepened entrancingly when Robert was introduced to her. Miss Pamela Stone. Now, thought Robert wildly, when she touched his hand with warm soft fingers, this is a one for the MacDougall, and not the other who has no heart and no blood. The girl even curtseyed to him, a trifle mockingly, but she said, in a voice like a dove, " A good evening to you—Father." Her English accent did not strike harshly on his ear; it lingered in it, like music.

Mary accepted a chair, without looking at the MacDougall

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directly, but Pamela blithely spread her yellow skirts and openly prepared to enjoy herself on this odd evening. " And how do you find our prison? " she asked the priest, as she accepted a glass of sherry with an upward and merry glance at the MacDougall.

Robert did not know what to say. He pondered, his cheeks flushing. " Cold," he said at last.

Pamela laughed. It was a full-throated laugh, without reserve or demureness. It was the laugh of a woman who loved to live and who found every day enthralling, even a day like this.

Miss Joyce said nothing. She had refused sherry with the mere turning aside of her head. Robert had not yet heard her voice. He was sure that it would be chill and metallic, and he started when she turned her aristocratic head to him and fixed him with those pale blue eyes glinting like stone between golden lashes.

" He—" she said, indicating the MacDougall as though he were a servant, and not looking at him but merely bending the back of her long white hand in his direction—" is holding us prisoner here unlawfully and against our will. I hope you can help us, and then arrange for his punishment."

Her voice was exactly as Robert had expected. He struggled, but he disliked her with growing strength.

" I shall countenance no unlawfulness in my parish," he said.

For the first time Mary looked straight at the MacDougall, whose fatuousness increased. It was not possible, thought Robert, that those rather protuberant blue eyes of hers actually softened just a little! He leaned forward to see her more clearly. Yes, they were softer, though her mouth remained prim and closed. She will make a harsh, demanding wife, thought the priest, and will wither the heart of a man, even the heart of the MacDougall.

" When will Your Highness permit us to leave? " asked Mary in her clipped voice with its undertone of hard struck silver. " Yes, we have asked it before, but now I ask you before a witness."

" When we are married, my dear love," said the MacDougall in softest tones which startled Robert by their depth of emotion. " Then we shall visit your parents together."

" Then I shall never see my parents again," said Mary, without inflection. " They will wonder who our invented friends are in Dundee, when they receive those false letters from us. They will make more inquiries . . . they will go to Edinburgh."

" Not your sweet mama, my pet," said Pamela, smiling happily. " Hasn't she been an invalid since your last darling brother was born? As for your dear papa, would he be so rash as to leave his counting-house to search for you furiously? " She turned her merry, sparkling face to Robert. " Do not fear, Father, that our families are in distress. Only Mary is. I think."

Mary coloured so vividly that Robert knew at once that she had a very bad temper indeed, a bad augury in an intended wife. In some fashion he knew the rage was directed at Pamela, who had so blithely belittled her before strangers.

Pamela, glancing up sideways at Douglass, lifted her glass.

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" More sherry, Douglass, if you please," she said. Her voice was seductive, and Robert's head swung to her. He saw her eyes, so black and so shining, and he saw them glisten, and he knew at once that this girl, this charming, merry-hearted, and realistic girl, loved the MacDougall, and loved him passionately. He had heard of lovelight in one's eyes, but he had never seen it before. He recognised it as one recognises all true things at once.

But the MacDougall had no thought for her. He refilled the glass, and he looked only at his Mary, who was suddenly looking only at Pamela with a most interesting expression. Mary's face changed. It hardened, tightened. " Is one glass not enough, Pamela? " she asked.

" Never enough," said Pamela. Her fingers had managed to touch the MacDougall's fingers, but they might not have touched him at all, for all he seemed to know.

An elaborate, and obviously false, curve of disgust appeared on Mary's lifted upper lip, and revealed teeth that were entirely too large for a woman and entirely too glowingly wet. Pamela's teeth, showing now in a pert smile at her cousin, were as tiny and bright as pearls in comparison. Mary turned her head on its long neck to Robert again. " You see our plight," she said. " You must prevail on this man to free us and return us to our families."

" I am in no hurry," said Pamela, with a naughty flirt of her thick black lashes at Douglass who, alas, did not see it at all.

" Shameless! " cried Mary. She clasped her hands and turned again to Robert. " Help us! " she implored.

" I will do all I can," he promised, and did not know his voice was grim and firm.

" How will ye? " asked the MacDougall with genuine interest. " Not one MacDougall will take a message from ye, Faether, to the nearest isle, nor will he take ye himsel'. Ye cannot bribe a MacDougall. Ye could thunder and refuse absolution, but I—I am the MacDougall. Bear your soul in patience, Faether. My Mary and I will be married soon."

And, thought Robert dismally, remembering the softening of Mary's eyes and the faintest softening of her face, and her looks at her sprightly cousin, that will probably be the case. I could wish him a better fate, even gaol.

" I am the magistrate," said the MacDougall, with good temper. " I am the law. Dinna speak to me of God's law, Faether. There was many a mon in the Guid Book who took his wife as I took my Mary."

Mary clasped her hands to her excellent bosom with a somewhat dramatic gesture and leaned towards Douglass.

" Free us, free us! " she cried.

" Speak for yourself," murmured Pamela, but only Robert heard.

The MacDougall looked at Mary with his heart in his eyes. Robert wondered at the stupidity of men in love.

" Mary, ask me aught but that," he said.

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"Ye must let her go," said Robert, raising his voice wrathfully. "The sooner the better! If I have to row her all the way mysel'."

This highly amused the MacDougall. "Ye would drown in the first wave, puir Faether," he said.

The two girls regarded Robert with deep interest, and he was so mortified that he stood up and said, "I'll not stay in a hoose where I am insulted and my priesthood humiliated and my requests jeered at. But I warn ye, my laird, that this lass must leave your hoose, and the sooner the better for all of ye."

"Oh, ye are not leaving, laddie?" said the MacDougall. "We hae a fine joint tonight, and guid fresh fish, not herring, and the finest wines."

Robert had already smelled the alluring perfume of the dinner, but his mind was made up. He said to Mary formally, "Miss Joyce, I shall find a way to deliver ye. In the meantime, I wish to tell ye that I willna be a witness to any wedding that is forced, or where the bride is unwilling. Moreover, I willna be a witness to the wedding of a Catholic to a woman not of his Church. I promise ye all this, so he will have to let ye go."

Mary's head nodded solemnly, but her eyes, fixed on the priest's, were suddenly glaucous and veiled.

Pamela chuckled. "There you are, Mary," she said in a bright tone. "There can be no wedding. Be firm, Mary, my dear, be firm, and all will be well."

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Mary nodded, but her eyes shone with sudden hate on her cousin.

"I will remember; I will be firm," she said.

"Please God," said Pamela, and now for the first time Douglass looked at her and seemed to see her for once. "As for myself, if a man worshipped a heathen god, all stone and fire, I would say to him, 'Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God, and take me, my darling, wherever you will, to the very end of the world—if it is your will.'" Her voice trembled; tears appeared in her eyes. She made a choking sound, then sprang to her feet and ran from the room.

There was a little silence. The fire roared. The dinner bell sounded. Mary looked at the MacDougall, and her fair face was beautiful and there was no question but that the blue eyes were soft and faintly glazed. But the MacDougall looked at the door through which Pamela had vanished, and he scratched his head and murmured something to himself.

Robert, praying in his heart fervently, took himself off, pausing only in the bannered hall to sniff regretfully at the fragrances of dinner. But he had his pride.

Mistress MacDougall, not expecting him, had left. He had to satisfy his young appetite with cold lamb and colder vegetables. But, not so strangely, he ate almost with happiness.

One day, almost June, the MacDougall came to him, himself, greeting him with exuberance and just catching himself before he clapped the priest on a braced shoulder.

"My Mary will have me at last, Faether!" he cried.

Robert felt sick and undone. He fumbled for a chair in his parlour and sat down heavily. He could not speak.

"There are terms," said the MacDougall, and he seemed to fill the room. The priest shook his head despairingly.

The MacDougall chuckled. "I am master of all women."

"There was niver a mon," said Robert with aged wisdom, "who was ever master of any woman. Aweel. Let me hear the worst."

The MacDougall was silent again, and Robert looked at him.

"There is a worst, then?" said Robert hopefully.

The MacDougall's laugh was very loud and very long. But it was false. "Ye hae heard of Lady Godiva, Faether?" he said. "Weel, then, my Mary—she of the proud, high heart—thinks to humble me. Ye have said I am a despot, and so thinks my Mary, and she will humble me. So she will hae me if I walk through the streets of the hamlet at sundown, when a' are at home, men and women and bairns, on the first day of June, in my mother-nakedness, with not even a boot on my feet."

Robert could only stare at him and blink. The MacDougall chuckled again, but this time the sound was a trifle sickly. "I hae no fear that my folk will see me disgraced, Faether. They will pull their curtains and shut their doors, and not a man nor woman nor bairn will peep at me. I will walk through the streets with none to see."

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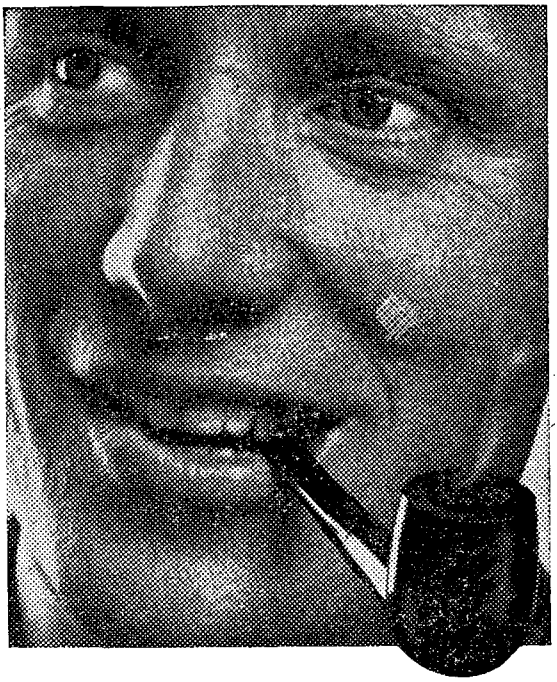

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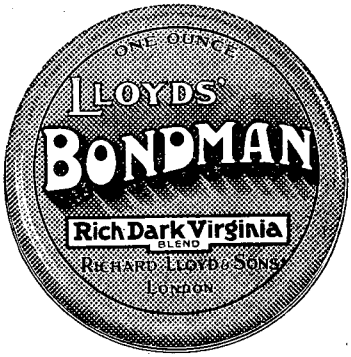

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" Ye would punish and humble yesel' so? " asked Robert.

" Nae more than standing or walking in my chamber at sundown, mother-naked, Faether, alone."

" She would ask this of ye? A woman who professes to love ye? "

" To humble me, the dear lass hae said. It is little enough for my Mary. But after we are married—"

Robert jumped up and cried, " It is nae to prove your love, nor to soften your despotism, which she knows, that she hae asked this silly and shameful thing of ye! It is to gain mastery over ye for life, ye puir fool, to set her foot upon your neck all the days of your life, to laugh in your face for what ye did in your folly! Do ye not see, mon? I hae called you a benevolent despot. But your Mary is a cruel one, and well ye shall rue it until the day ye die."

The MacDougall's face darkened dangerously.

" Ye do not even love her! " Robert said in his extremity. " I know this, in my heart! Ye are a despot, but benevolent, and ye are also a guid man. It is not possible for sich as ye to love sich a woman. It is your pride, your ugly pride, that will not be wise and will not understand! Ye hae said ye will marry her, and marry her ye will, if God does not halt it, because when ye make up your foolish mind ye feel less manly if ye change it! "

" Silence! " said the MacDougall, and Robert fell back before the furious thunder of that voice. And then courage returned to him.

" Do what ye will. There is no gainsaying ye, for ye are proud and without wisdom at a'. But I tell ye that if I witness your wedding, as I must as your priest, for ye are Catholic for a' your sins, it will be with a heavy heart and a sadness I hae never known before. But first ye must make your peace with God, in the Confessional, and receive absolution, and do penance, and one of the penances will be that ye free the little lass, Pamela Stone."

The MacDougall had regained his usual good temper. " That I will do, a' of it, and the day after I walk for my Mary, that day I will hae Pamela taken to Edinburgh." He took up his bonnet and said, " My Mary will marry me before ye, Faether, and after will take instruction. It could be ye'd dine with us? "

" No," said Robert. He had not wanted to weep since he had been ten years old and now he was afraid that he would, right before the MacDougall, unless he left quickly.

The news was all about the hamlet before sundown, and every soul swore by the saints that he would hide himself and would not look. But Robert did not believe them all.

He thought of going to each of his flock and telling them to hide themselves and not peer at the laird, but all, even the servile ones, would vow and promise. Ye could not trust the servile ones! They would peep, " accidentally " or inadvertently. They would be covered with sorrow, and in their mean hearts they would believe their protestations. Who could pierce the dark and devious heart of man? Not even a priest.

Robert knew that cold, proud women were selfish, and that selfish people can love no one but themselves. He had no doubt

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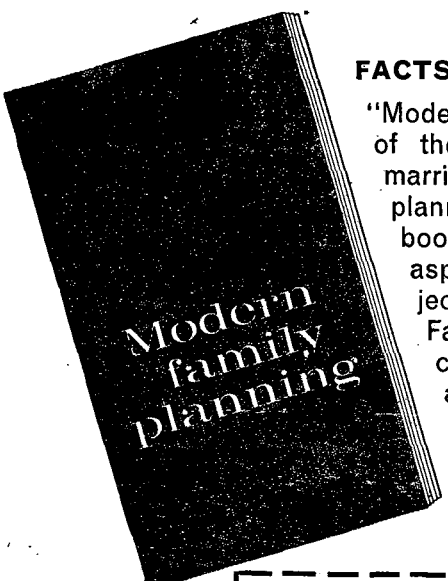

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but that Mary Joyce was fascinated, in spite of her nature, by the MacDougall, but it was a fascination, and even a gratitude, which was based on her own self-love and on her pride that such as the MacDougall could want her and go to such extremities to have her. She could extend her own self-love for a little to the one who had confirmed her opinion of herself. Even then, had she not seen Pamela's obvious love for him, and had not her amour-propre been angrily roused, she would still have rejected him. So there was spite mixed with her fascination. She could not have borne that at the last the MacDougall might have preferred Pamela to herself.

On the day before the day on which the MacDougall was to "pamper" his intended bride by walking naked through the few streets of the hamlet, Robert considered if he could call any peeping a mortal sin. But the Seminary had not provided, in its rules, for this contingency, so he solemnly told at Mass of Peeping Tom, who had been struck blind when gazing at the "unclad" and virtuous Lady Godiva. Unfortunately, the communicants were more fascinated by the story than the moral lesson. Those who loved the MacDougall truly, and therefore did not like his despotism, looked vexed that the pastor should even suggest that they would peep.

Walking through a street of little shops that afternoon, Robert came on Pamela Stone, who was listlessly glancing through the small windows, a parasol tilted over her head, her dark curls flowing from under a flowered bonnet with rosy ribbons, a rosy dress half concealed under a very long black cape which came almost down to her ankles and was embroidered with roses.

When she saw Robert she smiled, and her dimples appeared, but a moment later her eyes were glistening with tears. "I shall be leaving all of you very soon," she said. "I am sorry, Father."

"Sorry to leave this cold spot?" he asked. "Here it be, almost midsummer, and cold as April in Edinburgh."

"I still love it," said Pamela. She breathed deeply of the strong cool air and said, "I feel like a MacDougall myself! I seem to know the people well."

The tears were like diamonds on her thick lashes in that cold and brilliant sun. "Ah well," said the girl, trying to smile again, "I shall never forget this island. I shall be here in spirit if not in body. Douglass has sent letters to our families in London, though my great-grandmother, poor dear one, can hardly be aware that I'm even away. She often confuses me with my dead mother and other female relatives, so she has been spared any anxiety. But—Mary—has written to her parents that she will be married almost immediately to 'a rich and powerful Scots chieftain,' and that all gifts be sent to her here."

She lost no time, thought Robert. He was heartbroken over Pamela's gallantry and tremulous smiles. "Ye'll nae stay for the wedding?"

"No." Pamela paused, and a sad mischief flashed into her beautiful black eyes. "If I did, Father, I would object at each of

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the banns! And if that would not be enough, I would object at the altar itself! "

" I see," said Robert with gravity. She was quite capable of doing just what she had said, this spirited girl, this passionate and devoted girl. " Ye dinna like your cousin? "

" Mary? Oh, she is very well in her own milieu, in London. I did so want to see Edinburgh," added Pamela wistfully. " But I could hardly visit it alone, and I detest carrying maids with me. I wanted a companion, and I offered to take Mary, and her mother's maid—and that is why we are now here. Had I known—"

The generous girl, then, had paid all the expenses of this curious journey, and not Mary, the arrogant and disdainful. " I have left my diamond ear-rings for her," said Pamela. " My wedding gift." She looked down at her tiny slippered feet, and her throat trembled. " A good day to you, Father. I believe it is tea-time."

She hurried off with fast little steps, her head held up valiantly, and as she passed others in the street they looked at her with involuntary affection, and she bowed her head with courteous kindness. It was she, the generous-hearted, the kind, who should be lady of this isle, thought Robert, and he felt a little rebellious towards God. Then he remembered, with contrition, that if men are bent on destroying themselves God cannot interfere. Nevertheless, he went into the church and did some strenuous praying.

The appointed hour for what Robert considered the MacDougall's disgrace was sunset, he remembered. He said to Mistress MacDougall, who was very brisk and hurried in the house that day, " Sae that none will be tempted, Mistress MacDougall, you and I shall sit here alone with the curtains drawn, by the fire—disna it ever become warm a little?—and then when the MacDougall has passed we shall hae our tea."

Mistress MacDougall's face was a portrait of dismay; her eyes shifted. " My mon, at hame," she murmured.

" Oh, ye will both hide behind your curtains, virtuously? Invite him, then, to hae tea with me, for I havena seen him often."

Mistress MacDougall looked depressed. Then she shook her head. " He is shy, Faether. He'd like to be at hame, waiting for me." Then and there Robert decided that after tomorrow he would replace Mistress MacDougall. There must be a woman of spirit in the hamlet who truly loved Douglass, and must secretly, if not openly, be rebellious towards him in the manner of a true free Scot, an old lady whose blood ran truly in her veins and not treacherously.

He was really frightened now. Once the servile had seen their laird disgraced, they would flout even the simplest and most rightful laws of morality and self-respect, and the isle would come to the worst grief. Oh, if despots only knew what they did in their benign but too prideful hearts!

They knew better, they thought, than their people, what was good for them, and so they attempted to kill the independence born in man. God gave man free will; the despots had no use for it.

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Robert had hoped for thunder and lightning and dark skies and sheets of concealing rain for the next day, but it had dawned like a rose and as sweet and warm. Just as the church bells struck the hour of six Robert firmly drew the curtains over the little leaded windows, lit a lamp, looked Mistress MacDougall straight in the eye and sat down with his breviary. She stared at the fire, her thick red underlip moving in and out with her resentful thoughts.

There was only silence outside, and no sound of footstep, no voice, no movement. The high-minded and those who loved the MacDougall would be staring into their fires also; the servile would be silent, but peeping and gloating. Then Robert heard the smallest quick footsteps on the street—leather—like the footsteps of a child. The MacDougall's feet would make no sound on the cobbles, for they would be bare. Robert caught himself in the very act of going to the door and peremptorily ordering the child within until the MacDougall passed, and Mistress MacDougall's eyes gleamed hopefully. Robert went back to his seat before the fire. " Some foolish bairn who slipped away," said Robert. The clock ticked; the fire sang to itself.

Then, half an hour later, the streets were full of excited laughter and loud voices, and Robert ran to the door to find men bending over with mirth and women shrilling vehemently, and laughing also. He called urgently to his sacristan, whom he saw among the villagers, and the old man came at once, laughing so heartily that his face was crimson and tears were streaming from his eyes.

" Mind ye, Faether," he said honestly, after Robert had slapped him vigorously on the back, almost as strongly as the MacDougall's own slapping, " I didna see it with me ain eyes, but some there are who saw it and are telling of it."

" What? " said Robert, with the most awful forebodings. The servile had not wasted a moment to make game of their laird. And then he listened with astonishment and heard the whole story.

At sunset precisely, or just as the sun slipped down from behind the crag and began his solitary journey into the western ocean, the MacDougall had appeared alone at the gates of his house, naked as the day he had been born. He had stood there, gazing at the silent and empty street, and then had stepped forth.

What a grand figure he must have appeared, like the marble heroes and gods of ancient Rome, tall and broad and muscular, heroic and splendid in his manhood, and absolutely assured that no eye would look upon him in his nakedness! Robert thought, remembering his own days in Rome and his own awe.

But there were peeping eyes to see and gloat, behind the draperies, at the great laird who had been humbled by a mere woman. The eyes were suddenly dismayed, and they blinked. For the MacDougall had no sooner set his huge feet on the cobbles than " the little lassie, Miss Stone," had darted behind him, had thrown her black cloak with the roses over his shoulders—" and it coming down to the length of a kilt on him," said the sacristan, wiping away his tears of joy and mirth. And then she had taken his hand, firmly

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and strongly, and in silence—" and he looking doon at her as at an angel suddenly seen with his ain een," and she had walked beside him through the silent streets of the hamlet.

" Nae did they hurry," said the sacristan. " They walked like lovers in the gloaming, the MacDougall with the cape swinging just above his knees, and the wee lassie with her face all lit up with the sunset, and sometimes leaning her head against his shoulder."

Robert could see them with his inner eye, the noble if despotic MacDougall, and the intrepid and understanding girl beside him, and he rejoiced. He had not repudiated the girl and her mantle; he had held her hand; he had looked down at the riot of black curls on his shoulder; he had seen her passionate and loving and urgent face, her lovely and womanly face. He had seen love as he had never seen it before, and he had recognised it and had responded to it. He had known it all, in one flash of revelation.

He had been humbled as we all must be in the presence of unquestioning and unlimited love, which has much of God in it. He saw all that was to be seen, and it is given few men to see in that fashion.

" It was her footsteps which I had mistaken as the footsteps of a bairn on the cobbles, her faithful and following footsteps, the only ones to break the silence."

The whole isle rejoiced over the wedding of the MacDougall and his lovely bride, who was as fair in her soul as she was fair in her face.

It was Mary Joyce who was sent off the next day, with all her bags and luggage, not with the husband she had wanted in her arrogance, but only with two fishermen. It was Mary Joyce who was put on the train for Edinburgh. Robert, somewhat sinfully, would sometimes amuse himself with a conjecture about her enraged thoughts, she the rejected, the sent off, the abandoned, the ultimately unwanted, she who had never had anything to give except her barren heart and her ugly pride.

And as for the diamond ear-rings Mary received from her cousin, she took them away with her. " What could a mon expect but that? " said Robert. " It was sae like her." © Taylor Caldwell 1963

Doughty Chieftain is from Taylor Caldwell's new story collection, To See the Glory, to be published by Collins this autumn

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 136

Across. 1, *Dismiss.* 5, *Waiters.* 9, *Flute.* 10, *Outrigger.* 11, *Retain.* 12, *Braggart.* 14, *Ideal.* 15, *Noiseless.* 18, *Goldsmith.* 20, *Poser.* 22, *Deadline.* 24, *Jaguar.* 26, *Bandaging.* 27, *Nears.* 28, *Red tape.* 29, *Goddess.*

Down. 1, *Deferring.* 2, *Scuttle.* 3, *Ice-fields.* 4, *Soon.* 5, *Watertight.* 6, *Icing.* 7, *Engrave.* 8, *Strut.* 13, *Indian file.* 16, *Explained.* 17, *Surprises.* 19, *Learned.* 21, *Sausage.* 22, *Debar.* 23, *Llama.* 25, *Agog.*

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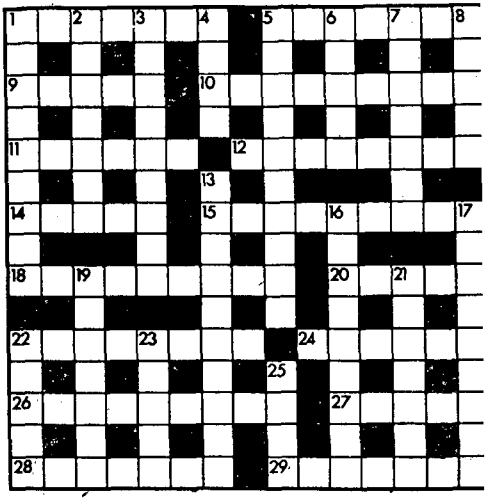
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution on page 13!



ACROSS

1 Sergt.-Major has the last word (7).

5 They also serve! (7).

9 Wind instrument in the groove (5).

10 Outside, spiderman found in canoe (9).

11 Concerning tinfoil for keep? (6).

12 Plays card game with skill—and knows it! (8).

14 Hide Alec. He's perfect at heart (5).

15 Upset, one is less silent (9).

18 Author is crafty! (9).

20 Model provides a problem (5).

22 Not a live wire—it's the limit! (8).

24 Wildcat begins with a pub crawl (6).

26 Venerable orchestra is binding! (9).

27 Comes close to tangled snare (5).

28 Scarlet ribbon? Gets in your hair, certainly! (3, 4).

29 " She moves a ——, and she looks a queen " (Pope) (7).

DOWN

1 Fed up with straying —postponing (9).

2 Sink, coalbox, and scamper (7).

3 Beds of snowdrops? (3-6).

4 Not far off and so on (4).

5 Foolproof method of becoming tipsy? (5-5).

6 Cold comfort for a birthday cake (5).

7 Impress (7).

8 'Struth! Get the h—— out of it (5).

13 March past of North Americans? (6, 4).

16 Made clear to Edward in the end (9)

17 Sensations! Prussian half-back rises (9)

19 Lend ear to Leander the erudite (7).

21 Savoury South African custom (7).

22 Forbid crumbled bread (5).

23 Animal worth pounds to a mother (5).

25 Eager though nearly all past (4).

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